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THE BUXTED PINES

THE OPEN AIR YEAR

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE
SEASONS SELECTED FROM

The Times

WITH A PREFACE BY
VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODON, K.G.

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THE OPEN AIR YEAR

The papers reprinted in this volume have already been published in *The Times*. The increasing tendency to print in our newspapers articles and letters about Nature is a favourable sign. It is evidence that interest and pleasure in outdoor Nature become more widespread and popular ; and there is no more wholesome, satisfying, and refreshing recreation than this. To one who lives in the country it enriches the whole year ; to one who is compelled to live mainly in a town it gives the certainty, so far as there can be certainty in human affairs, of an interesting and refreshing holiday at week-ends or for longer periods, and this is available for everyone, for there is very little indeed that is described in this book which necessarily requires the possession of or access to private and exclusive property for its enjoyment.

But publication of articles such as these in a daily paper imposes some limitation on the enjoyment of them. Each one may add to the pleasure of the day on which it appears, but it cannot be kept at hand by the reader and referred to at specially suitable moments in the future. Articles can, indeed, be cut out of a newspaper and kept together, but this is not so convenient a form for keeping or reference as is a book.

Besides this limitation there is another. To enjoy Nature or writing about Nature not only leisure but freedom of mind is essential, and there are many days,

especially in the lives of men concerned with business or politics, when these conditions are not present together. An article about Nature may pass with the daily paper on some day when the reader has not the mind or the spirit proper to receive what the writer has to give. These drawbacks or limitations do not apply to a book, and the papers here reprinted merit this more permanent and accessible form.

And now a few words about these papers in particular. They do not contain, I imagine, anything that is not well known to one who is a specialist in the subject of which each paper treats. But the information given is not therefore negligible. There is very little knowledge of natural history of which it is not more true to say "comparatively few people know this" than to say "*every one* knows this." There are many things in this book about common country objects that are not common knowledge even to dwellers in the country. But the purpose of those who have written these papers is one higher than the mere imparting of information. It is to convey to readers something of the enjoyment that the writers themselves have felt in what they have seen. Those who can visit any one of the places described will find some aspect of it that has interested or appealed to the writer, and thus may show the visitor what to look out for and how to enjoy it.

The chapter called "River Magic" is an example. It will enrich and add to the pleasure of any visit to a country reach of the Thames in mid-summer.

The description in "A March Snow Storm" of delicate beauty lit by the sun is an example of a different sort. The beauty was very brief and transient, but the effect of it on the writer and the memory of it was a permanent possession. "River Magic" shows pleasure can be found in some aspect of Nature that is permanent and accessible

to us at will. The description of the snow in March shows how an eye that watches can, out of what is rare and very fleeting, gain something that enriches memory for life.

It is comparatively easy to describe literally what we see. This can be done while we see it. To convey what we have felt requires literary achievement. It is the difference between a photograph and the work of a great portrait or landscape painter. The artist makes us not only to see, but to feel, because he himself has felt. Emotion is essential to enjoyment.

The chapter on the "Dawn Chorus" is full of feeling and makes one long to hear the Dawn Chorus in May or early June. The writer admits the physical difficulty of hearing it unless one is afflicted with insomnia; and insomnia destroys all joy in anything. The best chance that I know of overcoming this difficulty is to sleep out of doors. There are small portable beds which, with their simple bedding, can be placed where the sleeper will be in the midst of the Dawn Chorus. With no roof but only the sky above and with breezes touching the head and face, one has very light sleep; one wakes often and easily, but one is refreshed. When the Dawn Chorus comes it will be all about us and some birds closer than at any other time. For in the very early hours wild animals and birds seem to take it for granted that they will not be disturbed by mankind. They will treat the person motionless in the outdoor bed as not being a human presence at all.

I had such a bed years ago at my cottage. One morning, when I had fallen into another light sleep after the Dawn Chorus had subsided, I woke again with the consciousness that something was happening close to me. There, so close to my face that by putting out a hand the birds could have been touched, a thrush was feeding one of its young on the lawn. Sleeping out of doors in this fashion is not recommended for comfort, but it has privileges and

compensations ; and in May and early June the Dawn Chorus is the most spirit-stirring and freshening event, even of that wonderful season.

The paper on the colour of autumn leaves will quicken a reader's feeling for that wonderful display. The autumn colours of the foliage of many trees are so complex and delicate that we may differ as to verbal description of them ; and the colours of one species of tree differ in various parts of the country. In late September the course of a burn flowing hidden in a deep channel through a highland moor may be traced from a distance by the bright colour of the mountain ash trees chance-sown along its banks. I have never seen such bright redness of mountain ash foliage in lowland English country.

There are some pleasing reflections in the latter part of the chapter. The writer notes that the colours of autumn leaves cannot be robbed of romance by being harnessed to some utilitarian purpose. Personally, I like to regard a tendency in Nature to infinite variety and beauty as the chief cause of what we see. Some of it serves a utilitarian purpose, but this is secondary in the design of Nature. The earth is full of wonderful things, and I like to dwell in thought on two of these especially. One is the infinite beauty of the world ; and the other, separate from and yet inseparably connected with the first, is the power of man to perceive this beauty and to be moved by it.

GREY OF FALLODON.

SPRING

HUNGRY WATERS

As the snow vanishes and the floods subside the land is not quite the same as when it put on its wintry clothing. Everywhere the forces of denudation have been working harder than in common times ; there has been a spurt in their age-long task of carrying hills and dales into the sea. In every ditch fed by a ploughed field the mouths of the runnels are strewn with accumulations of silt, or of heavier grit and sand dropped by a stronger current. The overflowing ditches have spilt their burden of alluvium upon the roads ; the grit of the roads themselves has been scoured from the interstices of the macadam. Banks of sand fill bays in the receding streams and have spread a bright floor for the minnows over shoals of decaying weeds. Along the larger streams wide tracts of meadows are grey with a layer of fine mud carried down from afar, like the fertile spilling of the Nile. And besides these banks and films of soil dropped by the gentle currents, or let fall as the force of the inundations declined, a mass of earth has been swept beyond our reckoning, to the mouths of the greater rivers or to raise bars and shoals at sea.

We have learned to ascribe the erosion of our hills and valleys more to the cumulative effect of slight and constant fret than to a few great cataclysms. Yet we can see that the rate of erosion is not uniform, but varies from year to year and month to month, and even from day to day, with the changes of the weather. February is a scouring month, because then the snows of winter thaw and the filled dykes overflow with the latter rain. Afterwards, in a normal year, come the winds of March and prepare the earth for the

spring sowing. Nor is February itself the same in every year, or turbulent October, which leads in the season of storm. In the vast length of a geological period a difference of a few millimetres in the deposits of one decade and another may perhaps seem almost negligible, like the height of the mountains themselves compared with the whole extent of the earth's surface. Our span of life is too brief for that bird's-eye view of the tides of time on which alone we could base sure knowledge of earth's changes ; and the evidence of written records is scanty and almost of yesterday. But we do know enough to infer, or at least to suspect, that great periods of time include exceptional perturbations of Nature, just as the dozen years of a child's recollection are distinguished by February thaws or November floods.

Such a catastrophe as a landslip, or the collapse of the roof of a limestone cave, may itself be the climax of a long and gradual process of sap or solution. But sometimes the blow falls out of a blue sky, and the earth is scored more deeply in an hour than by the normal forces in many centuries. The catastrophic effects of violent rain-storms, or so-called " cloud-bursts," are most familiar in mountain regions, where the erosion and denudation are most pronounced. In several of the valleys of the Lake District the configuration of the fells has been substantially altered in living memory. But not only mountain districts are occasionally the scenes of sudden and catastrophic change. Not long ago the power of an exceptional storm was strikingly displayed in the gentle Chiltern Hills, at a height of no more than 500ft. or 600ft. After several hot May days a violent thunderstorm burst one evening with very heavy rain and hail. It lasted some two or three hours, and its conspicuous traces were confined to an area of a very few square miles, where the flood-water tore deep holes in the dry chalk " bottoms." Outside the area of heaviest rainfall a footpath led down a gentle slope from a wide arable hill to the valley of a small stream. Like most hill paths, this received the drainage of part of the slopes, and after heavy rain carried a trickle of mud into the valley.

During many years, or probably many generations, the joint attrition of foot traffic and the flow of water had lowered it only a very few inches beneath the slight fold in which it lay. After the storm the whole appearance of the slope was changed. The waters collected on the hill had ploughed along the path a channel with sharp edges like a fire-trench to a maximum depth of about 4ft. At the foot of the slope a mass of clay, grit, flints, and chalk rubble lay spread over the growing corn.

Clearly the erosion produced by such exceptional storms bears little relation to the wear and tear of the ordinary rainfall, and is infinitely more powerful. They occur at long intervals of time, and their traces are often confined to a narrow area. But in the course of ages their total effect must be great ; and although we may be tempted to lay stress on the more regular forces which help to shape the landscape, because they allow of more accurate calculation, we cannot leave out of account the possibility of these sudden and sweeping changes.

MIGRATION TIME

April winds and suns set most birds hurrying on a journey, and the Spring migration includes many more species than our summer visitors. When England grows warm enough for the swallow and the nightingale, it is too hot for the homing instinct of the fieldfares ; and when the sandpiper appears on the mudbanks by the ebbing streams, it is time for the last of the pipits to be gone to the crags and fells. There is one kind of fascination for the bird-lover in welcoming home the summer birds from their sojourn far in the South, and another in bidding good-bye to the noisy flocks of fieldfares, ardent already for their nesting in the Baltic pines. They form on the eve of departure their largest flocks of the whole year, convening in beech-woods and thorn-brakes, and chattering in excitement. While they delay to cross to the snow-bound Scandinavian forests, the tide of migration from the South has already overtaken them. Chiffchaffs chant in the same beechwood their song of English spring ; by the side of the thorn-brake on the downs the wheatear clacks his odd song, like the water-ousel's, and flashes and hides his white feathers like a signal-lamp for his lagging hen. Continents and far latitudes meet together ; while the fieldfares chatter of departure for high Norway, the swallow may come gliding in, as we now know, from wintering on South African farms.

There is a like agitation and movement among many of our most home-keeping species. No bird seems more sedentary than the moorhen, when we see it in every month of the year on the orchard pond. Yet migrating

moorhens turn up in April in the most unexpected places—the tops of thick bushes far from water, or on rocky streams that guide them from one valley into the next. It is the same with many thrushes, with kingfishers, and dabchicks, and, in fact, with almost all the species which are classed as “resident.” The species remains, but individuals wander and return. Some high districts are quite bare of song-thrushes in normal winters. In other parts the native larks and wood pigeons nearly all migrate, but their places are filled for the winter by aliens from the east and north. The kingfisher departs in most winters to the larger rivers and returns, as Tennyson’s “sea-blue bird of March,” or April, to the smaller upland streams, where it nests. Dabchicks appear for a day or two in April in valuable and highly sophisticated trout-streams of the south, where their presence is not permanently tolerated. These are some of the more familiar glimpses of the kaleidoscopic spectacle of migration, such as we may see with a little good fortune in almost any country district on a spring walk. Rarer migrants keep to the lonelier hills and marshes, or are seen near our homes in the early morning, before they are driven on by the stir of human traffic. And on outlying islets, where the land-birds rest on a sea passage, sedulous observers have been yearly adding new species to our British fauna.

If birds needed only as much room in spring and early summer as in winter, migration might be no more than a casual and unsystematic movement, dependent upon weather and food. Such limited migration is seen when grouse descend towards the valleys to escape snow, or London sparrows go harvesting in the cornfields in August. The greater migrations that we usually associate with the name seem primarily due to the appetites of the broods of young. A hundred chaffinches in winter will feed together in a single field ; but when they are paired and nested, each pair requires a considerable area for its own hunting-ground. Other birds—thrushes, woodpeckers, or what not—may overlap the chaffinch preserves, and no harm be done, presumably because the food of their young

is different ; but chaffinches will, as a rule, only be found nesting close together where there is an exceptionally abundant food supply. This habit of staking out claims for the breeding season can be clearly observed when several pairs of robins nest in a garden, or rival nightingales occupy a tract of shrubbery. When spring comes, and the flocks break up, many pairs of birds must travel far to find an unoccupied site that suits their needs at this season. Gradually the species will extend to the margin of summer subsistence ; then, as winter returns, it will congregate in flocks again, and tend to seek warmer climes, where food remains sufficiently abundant for the survivors of the hosts of May. This spring expansion and winter contraction give the elements of seasonal migration ; but we still know little of the original home of each species, of the changes in the earth's surface which in the course of ages may have influenced its distribution, or of the hereditary faculty which guides it to its winter or summer home. " The way of a bird in the air " helps to make it one of the most exquisite of earth's creatures, and the season of its home-coming the most delightful in the cycle of the year.

CAMPS ON THE HILLS

In March the ancient camps emerge from the rain-clouds on the hills, and seem to expand their ramparts to the sun. Seen from the vale beneath, their lines so closely follow the crests and contours of the hills that they appear to have grown out of the earth itself, rather than to have been shaped and piled by man. Nowadays most earthen strongholds are called "Roman" camps; but camps of genuine Roman construction are comparatively rare, and have a different character. Their sharp rectangular lines have the stamp of an organized civilization imposing itself on nature's irregularity, and rather despising it. The more ancient camps reveal the mind of a people still part of nature, or only slowly struggling above it; half fearing it, half loving it by blind attraction, but possessed by it in all they thought or wrought.

Such names as Roman Camp or Caesar's Camp are modern, and due to the popular tendency to group the past round a few main figures. Rarely such a name as Bloody Acre seems to perpetuate the storming by a Saxon tribe of a defended stronghold. But the various Grim's Dykes, and probably also Scratchbury (named from "Old Scratch"), set the fashion of ascribing these huge and unaccountable works to the agency of the devil. These names are eloquent of the gulf which already separated the England of the Saxon invaders from the builders of the great chalk camps. Three thousand years or more may well have passed over the camps before the coming of the Saxons; for the art of shaping these earthen banks was, after all, less exacting than the transportation and erection

of the great monoliths of Stonehenge. The blood of the neolithic people still ran strong in the land when the Saxons came, as, indeed, it does to-day. But bronze, and iron, and the successive races which used them, had swept over the island since those yet more ancient Britons polished their stone tools in the newer manner. Beneath these invasions of Gaels, and Brythons, and later of Romans, the descendants of the camp-builders had lost the story and meaning of the camps, of the barrows, of the great mound called Silbury, and of Stonehenge itself. They could no more explain them to the newcomers than the modern inhabitants could account for the great stone images of Easter Island.

In a history of several thousand years, the hill camps may first have been permanent settlements, and later occasional refuges in wartime. The simplest explanation of their water supply is that their inhabitants, with their flocks and herds, depended daily on the springs and streams in the valleys. The objection that they would have been forced to surrender from thirst after a few days' siege is not material ; this may well have been their fate, at turning-points in island history. They would at least have been able to beat off raiders, which is as much as most men can hope for, in wild lands and times. A reserve of water may also have been provided by making ponds. Nowadays, if we see a pond on a dry chalk hill we call it a dew-pond, and make a marvel of it. But rain falls on chalk hills as it does elsewhere ; and a pan of puddled chalk will hold rain water. The rain water is sometimes supplemented by condensed mist, and not least on summer nights ; but the mainstay of a dew-pond is rain, and the hill-dwellers must have been able to make ponds to hold it without any knowledge of thermo-dynamics, or even the modern refinements of layers of rubble and straw.

There appears no reason why ancient dew-ponds should not still be traceable on the smooth chalk sward ; but not every excavation in or near a neolithic earthwork is necessarily of neolithic age. On the steep slope beneath Chiselbury Camp in Wiltshire, an antiquary may one day



IN THE VALE OF EVESHAM

discover a narrow shaft sunk in the chalk, with a stimulating suggestion of having been a flint quarry for the manufacture of arrow heads, like those believed to have been found in the camp at Cissbury. If he searches for picks of deerhorn, he will not find them ; though possibly there may still lurk there a pick-head of modern pattern, or perhaps an entrenching tool. This hole is much later than Chiselbury, being in fact of the present Georgian epoch ; it was dug early in the war of that period by troops in the contemporary camp beneath the hill. The chalk from it was used to inlay the turf with the designs of regimental badges. Yet how soon, under the enduring dykes of Chiselbury, will the last eye-witness pass who could say " I mind the digging o't."

The agglomeration of huge banks and mounds of soil seems to have outrun in the neolithic people any consideration of mere utility, and to have become a passion or cult. The dead were honoured by heaping much earth above them, as later men erect large stones ; and the great scarped banks on the hill-top express a pride in the magnitude of the work, as well as mere desire for security. Pride in a tradition of earth-building may account for the long, low dykes which wander across the hills in several counties, and otherwise are hardly accountable. Even if we picture them in their prime as topped with a stout palisade, they appear ill-adapted for defence, both from their want of continuity and their disregard of the natural contours. If human nature was much what it is now, a perfectly indefensible rampart may in time have been regarded as giving a neat finish to a gentleman's estate.

BIRDS IN OUR CREEK

To our sheltered creek resort many kinds of birds when the weather is severe and food scarce on the northern and eastern coasts. A stranger might imagine himself in the estuary of a river, but there is no river ; in some remote geological period the waves discovered a breach in the hard mica-slate cliffs, and flowed inland up the soft valleys.

At the ebb tide large expanses of silvery mud flats, coloured here and there with weed like some Byzantine mosaic, are left bare ; and here the wild fowl gather in a chattering crowd to search for eels, worms, and the smaller molluscs. The creek is the favourite resort of wild fowl ; here the graceful little redshank may be seen running on the edge of the lapping waves with a swift stooping motion, so fast that their feet hardly seem to touch the ground. They rise in flocks when disturbed, and sweep across the surface of the water in a silver cloud, uttering a shrill but musical cry to warn the other birds of approaching danger ; afterwards alighting on the rocks with a gentle upward tilt of the wings which shows their white underfeathers like a flash of light. The curlew follow them, filling the air with their beautiful whistle ; and the wild duck and widgeon make off with incredible speed, climbing in big circles until almost lost to sight in the aether.

The gulls, who know that they have nothing to fear from the sportsman, remain in a turbulent, noisy, raucous crowd upon the shore. In the middle of this parliament on the sands are two huge greater blackbacks, the span of whose wings is more than a yard ; they are so fierce and voracious that they have been known to devour a lamb,

and are the terror of smaller birds. At a discreet distance, content perforce with the lesser prey of the shore, are the common gulls and herring gulls, with graceful kittywakes and little black-headed gulls on the outskirts of the crowd.

An old heron has a pool to himself, in which he stands philosophically on one leg, or pokes majestically among the weeds with his long, infallible beak. The birds are jealous of their own particular haunts, and when the heron recently came lumbering-down the harbour to Mill Bay, where eels are thickest, he was driven ignominiously away by an angry crowd of gulls who had staked an earlier claim to this stretch of sand.

Many rooks feed on the mud ; they will pick up a wrinkle in their beaks, carry it to a height, and drop it on the rocks so that the shell is broken. Since few creatures are wholly content with their own element, the gulls, on the other hand, may be seen following the plough in a white, importunate crowd, fighting for the worms that are turned up in the rich, red, steaming furrow, with such an accompaniment of raucous cries that young horses will grow restive and sometimes break the trace.

Birds of prey have multiplied exceedingly of late, and out on Bolt Head are a pair of buzzards ; when one of them tried to penetrate up creek he was set upon and mobbed by about a dozen herring gulls. In the afternoon the wild duck and widgeon that have been feeding up creek assemble in a flock of two or three hundred and fly at a great height in V formation straight out to sea ; perhaps they rest awhile upon the waves or turn up coast and fly in safety over the water to Slapton Lees, their favourite resting-place.

The diving birds find life difficult when gales have made the water so muddy that they cannot see the fish. Many cormorants and green-tufted shags, whose usual fishing grounds are out on the rocky coast, are diving up creek. These voracious birds eat their own weight in fish in prosperous times. The cormorant half springs from the water and dives with a splash, but the graceful great northern divers vanish silently beneath the surface, where they will remain as long as a minute and a half.

Outside the creek, at the foot of the rugged cliffs, the open sea breaks in a long line of white foam. All day long above Gammon Head, which stands like a buttress in the sea, the gulls circle and wheel and tumble and glide with widespread motionless wings ; or blow like flakes of foam on the wind close to the surface of the angry waves. They are venturesome birds, and delight in perching on the water close to some half-submerged rock, where they will ride serenely until the huge Atlantic swell curls with a snarl into foam as if to overwhelm them ; then they rise gracefully in the air and descend upon the water beyond the crest while the wave sweeps on to break against the rock in impotent fury. As the shadows gather the gulls come flapping down the harbour to roost on the cliffs ; a ray of light from the westering sun falls upon the sails of a schooner in the bay ; tall ships pass like ghosts down channel ; then come night and the stars, and if the moon is shining and the flats are bare, the whistle of the whimbrel will haunt the lonely creek.

SPRING BUTTERFLIES

Spring sunshine wakes the lightest and freshest flowers, but the deepest and richest butterflies. There is no parallel among the blossoms of spring—white snowdrops, yellow celandines and dandelions, moonlight-yellow primroses—to the massed purple of the heathers and willow herbs, and many other flowers which reign from July to October. But the rich reds and dusky undersides of the peacock and tortoiseshell butterflies which now flit in the sun again are in keeping with that deepened tone of nature which comes when the year is declining. They harmonized with the dahlias and heliotrope of late summer gardens, in which we last saw them feasting, or with the purple scabious blossom that cloaked the autumn hills. With all else in nature as tender and delicate as a white violet, their richness, if not unwelcome after a long grey winter, seems a little unseasonable.

It is due to the curious fact that they are survivors of the opposite season. The earliest butterflies are not hatched by the spring sun, or the warmth of the building in which they are seen flitting, as is credited in popular report; they have been sleeping like the dormouse or the bear, and now judge it meet to return to a warmed, aired world. Even in January the sunshine in some hillside corner will sometimes draw a tortoiseshell forth, or a fire on a mild evening awaken one from its lair behind the bookcase. It is doubtful whether these distractions are good for them; for in midwinter they will find no flowers to feed on, and must needs return fasting to sleep. The tortoiseshells which course about the banks in April are

only the remnant of those which we saw coming indoors in September, or found clinging to the beams of the fruit-room, when we went to choose pears for Christmas dessert. The stiff frames of sleepers which did not awaken can be swept almost by the dozen out of old lofts. Hibernating peacock butterflies are found less often ; large tortoiseshell and the other members of their family more rarely still. They are much less abundant, and seem fonder of taking refuge in hollow trees and faggot-stacks than in buildings. Red admirals have so seldom been found hibernating that they have been suspected (probably unjustly) of failing to achieve hibernation in Britain at all, and of replenishing their stock each season by spring immigration, as is the general rule with the closely allied species, the painted lady. But peacocks, the two tortoiseshells, and the strangely fretted commas are all more or less familiar in the spring sunshine ; and with them awakens the brimstone butterfly, of a different family, but sharing this hibernating habit.

The main object of these awakened butterflies is to mate and lay their eggs. The eggs must be laid on young shoots of the plants proper to the species ; and thus the butterflies are concerned more with leaves than flowers. Not one of these early spring butterflies does any damage in a garden, or deserves to be regarded as a pest. There is a bare exception in the diet of the comma's caterpillars, which prefer the hop-plant ; but in this country, at any rate, they never do harm worth mention. The peacock family mostly gnaw thistles and nettles ; and the brimstone searches brakes and hedges for the buckthorn. Not till the white butterflies emerge from the chrysalides a little later is there any threat to edible greens. Flowers attract the awakened butterflies comparatively little ; they gorged their fill from the nectarines of August and September, and in that strength seem to live out their day, and hand on life. Yet they do snatch refreshment now and then from the early spring flowers. Brimstones will occasionally visit one primrose after another, or the early vetch ; but the chief tavern of the peacock tribe is in the blossoming willow, or palm-willow. After the faint insect life of winter, there is a welcome

colour and vigour in these scented boughs, where the butterflies jostle the bumble-bees.

Warmth rather than food appeals to the awakened butterflies in their moments of leisure ; they delight in basking in the sunshine on a dry bank, a tree-trunk, a stone, a brick post or wall, or almost anything that throws back the heat. The peacocks and tortoiseshells open their wings wide, slowly raising and lowering them in enjoyment ; their most brilliant colours are thus displayed, and no use is made in these perceptive moments of the dark pattern on their underside which conceals them in their winter sleep. Brimstones will sometimes settle on a yellow chip or dry leaf ; and at first they appear to do this in obedience to an instinct of adaptation in their yellow blending with the yellow. But a comma butterfly has been seen to rest on a piece of yellow paper in just the same way, though it only emphasized its redness. It is probable that these hibernated butterflies are attracted to yellow surfaces in early spring by their suggestion of light and warmth. In sunny years they are often out and about long before the young shoots of the food-plant are ready to receive their eggs, and their days then are full of idleness. They sport and soar, and bask, butterflies to the end, although their worn and frayed wings betray them as elders of a bygone season. The last of them do not vanish until the lanes and rides are full of the fritillaries and orange-tips of late May.

NIGHTINGALES IN MAY

Nightingales are at the height of their song-time in mid-May, when the yellow nettle is mingled with the bluebell blossom in their favourite copses. They begin to sing in the first fine weather after they arrive, usually in the third week in April, and they fall silent in the second week in June. Their passion seems to burn out the earlier for its intensity : nearly a month after the greater singer is silent the blackcap is still warbling in the garden beeches and the garden warbler pouring its lower notes from the dense green thickets.

It is well known that nightingales (which sing in England at most for eight weeks in the year) do not visit the far west or north, but it is not quite true that there are none in Devonshire or in Wales. They are found in the east of Devonshire and of Glamorganshire, and they extend northwards as far as the country round York. They grow scarcer towards their extreme limits, and they tend there to be confused in popular repute with other singers, especially with the sedge warbler, which sings much by night in June and July. The nightingale's headquarters are in the Home Counties and East Anglia, and here in suitable places they abound. They love best a thick green copse or pheasant cover, with plenty of undergrowth of hazels, hawthorns, blackthorns, willows, and other deciduous trees. Thick hedges suit them well, and quiet old garden shrubberies, not overrun by dogs and cats. Nesting on or very near the ground, they are much exposed, like redbreasts, to the attacks of four-footed vermin and to disturbance from quadrupeds of all kinds. This is

probably the chief reason why they usually avoid woods full of rabbits, though they also like a thought more moisture in the soil and air than pleases the sand-loving coney. Pinewoods they avoid, unless they are very liberally mixed with deciduous bushes; and they are not often found much above 400ft. above sea-level, though most of the other warblers show no dislike for cover on higher ground.

The nightingale is a near relative not only of the garden warbler and other summer migrants, but of our resident redbreasts and thrushes. The highest gifts of song are centred in this tribe of birds, just as we look for wisdom in the crow family and truculence in the hawks and eagles. The nightingale has beauty, but not brightness, of plumage; he is much like a larger and more intelligent-looking garden warbler, with a dash of the redstart's fire and quiver in his tail. His first cousinship to the redbreast is betrayed by his nest and eggs and young. Clip a nightingale's nest of its fringe on three sides, fit it into a hole in a primrose bank, and you will have the nest of the robin. There is a pale, mottled variety of the nightingale's egg which comes very near to the darkest and most thickly clouded robin's eggs. And young nightingales and young robins in their spotted fledgling dress are as like as the children in a charity school. The old birds, too, have the same intelligent-looking heads, and the large crepuscular eye which is a token of their evening habits.

Like many things of world-wide repute, the nightingale's song often brings disappointment on a first hearing. How many people can honestly say that they were at once impressed by Niagara, or Stonehenge? Had we to choose one singing bird for good and all, we might well take the blackbird, or the song-thrush before him. They sing at least as sweetly as he, for far longer in the year, and at seasons when song is rare. Some would even prefer the skylark's music, for its unbroken flow. Brokenness is undoubtedly the fault of the nightingale's song; over and over again he pauses for a couple of seconds when we

crave continuity. But to ask that song of such force should be continuous is to require too much of an ounce's weight of flesh and blood. Almost every note of his song can be followed at half a mile's distance ; at five yards—when you steal to him on the warm May nights—it thrills the ear with its vehemence, and it echoes from the trunks of trees. Shall song like this be as unbroken as the twitter of the linnet ? Yet at times, both by day and by night, when the fullness of his passion is on him, the pauses are so short, the song so long sustained, and each new strain so powerful, original, and surprising, that the primacy of the nightingale as a singer can surely be denied only by an inveterate paradox-monger, or by people to whom spring makes no appeal. It is the secret of the nightingale's song to express the vitality of May, the urgent impulse of growth, the year's great labour of love. Beside it, the blackbird's song is lazy, the thrush's shrill and mannered, and other birds are inconsiderable twitterers. The repetition of the nightingale's song is as intense as its originality. "Ityn, Ityn, Ityn," he calls, 20 times over ; so that the old Greeks made the bird a mourner, ingeminating the name of the dead. There is truly a kind of anguish in the intensity of the nightingale's expression of spring ; but on the whole, to modern ears, it is a song of joy.

Nightingales have slowly retreated before the spread of building round London, and other large towns, and the multiplication of cats, dogs, rats, and exploring children which overrun the remaining copses and woods. But many places within 20 or 25 miles of the centre of London are still full of their song in May. They will sing in the hedges of motor-haunted highways, if they have a small sanctuary near by where they can nest in safety and peace. One annual resort of many nightingales is Maidenhead Thicket, at the junction of the Bath and Henley roads. Here, among the bushes where once lurked the highwayman, they vie with, and excel, a numerous company of blackcaps, whitethroats, garden and willow warblers, linnets, and many other song-birds.

Wander among the flowers and verdure of this pleasant place, until you come on a bird singing with thrice the power of any other, and you will have found the nightingale.

BRITISH SERPENTS

An ancient and authoritative prejudice against the serpent has blinded mankind to the respectable virtues of this tribe. To inhabitants of various tropical countries, who are liable to be hustled by pythons, or have surprises prepared for them by puff-adders, some intemperance of sentiment may be pardoned. There, it may be but natural human weakness either to wish to exterminate all serpents, or to worship them. But British serpents display such continence and discretion, that it may fairly be said they set humanity a good example.

Ireland they avoid altogether. But when they wake in spring in Britain, and leave their lairs, they do not raven for human slaughter, or concentrate their unwinking eyes on working evil for men. The adder or viper, and it alone, has a poisonous bite; and although this may be serious, and has sometimes been fatal, the adder never inflicts it except in what it believes to be self-defence. A difficulty is, of course, that the creature is sometimes imperfectly informed of our designs. Not even the serpent's wisdom can tell it that if we kick it with a nailed boot the affront is entirely accidental; very excusably, it may lash at our shin with its fangs. Leggings are therefore not amiss when shooting, fishing, or in pursuit of other forms of pleasure among the adder's haunts. But when an adder is not too rudely alarmed, it will glide off as peaceably as an earthworm. As for its fare—in which dust is not included—the chief place seems usually to be taken by field-mice. Lizards and frogs—the chief food of our other English snakes—from the

standpoint of human economy are almost negligible ; but the adder is among our benefactors.

Dry banks sprinkled with the flowers of an early March are favourite haunts both of adders and grass-snakes, and of the slow-worm or blind-worm which resembles them. Indeed, the warm slope scented with violets, and teeming with green shoots among the dry trash, seems to need the rustling glimpse of a snake to make it perfectly typical of the time. The starry stitchwort, which flowers at the end of March in forward seasons, is in some country districts called "adders' meat," from a notion that the serpent feeds on this unbaleful herbage. Adders are of very various colours—brown, red, or even yellow, when they have newly changed their skins—but they are always distinguishable from the grass-snake. Apart from their stouter shape, they are to be identified by the chain of dark diamond markings down the spine, or by an almost uniform duskiness. The grass-snake's dark markings are discontinuous—he is sometimes called the "ringed" snake ; and besides his greenness, which has also given him the name of the green snake, he has a conspicuous yellow patch on either side of the neck. After a little practice, the two can be distinguished at a glance. But it is unwise to pick up your serpent for identification ; for even if, as in most districts is most probable, it turns out to be a grass-snake, it is likely to eject a truly skunk-like liquid, only tolerable as an alternative to a viper-bite.

A viper of 2ft. long is a good large one, whereas a green-snake of 4ft. is not exceptional, and yet nobler ones have been taken. Four feet of green and yellow scaliness hurtling through the sedges conveys a genuine impression of serpenthood. An inexperienced ophidologist conceives he has had an adventure. Yet, except that it can prove itself no rosebud, the grass-snake is a creature without peril to man. It is mainly a frog-eater ; occasionally it will take small fish. It swims with its head and yellow collar held formidably aloft in the air ; and at such times, to bathers or even to fishermen, it appears in the new guise of a water-snake. But of these Britain has none—

except for the sea-serpent. Of true snakes, besides the two glanced at already, there is only the seldom-seen smooth snake, which basks on a few dry heaths of the New Forest and neighbouring shires, beloved by its prey of lizards. Were man's own ways less open to criticism, this appetite of serpents for lizards might be censured as very near cannibalism. Snakes and lizards are close of kin; and the most familiar representative of snakes to British youth—the blindworm—is a lizard internally, though he has discovered he can do best without legs. He is perfectly unobjectionable to handle—cool, dry, and muscular, with an attitude of dignified protest that never degenerates into mere petulance. Now and then, mutely eloquent, he flashes out his tongue; it is split in front, but not so deeply as the snakes', which have fathered on them the reproachful epithet "double-tongued." "That's what he stings with—the spiteful thing," is the cry to be heard on any bright summer day from the rails of the outdoor snake-cage at the "Zoo," as the grass-snake glides up the rock with his tongue flickering before him. It would be hard to pack more prejudice and misapprehension into a sentence. Man's old enmity for the serpent is still active, even where the serpent has almost forgotten its hostility to man.

A MARCH SNOWFALL

Instead of coming in like a lion March had come in like a lamb, and seemed determined to act the part to the end. Birds were in fuller song than usual at this date, and geese were seen going northward before their time—a sure sign of an early spring. The hedgerow lanes were yellow with hazel catkins, the ivory buds of the willow were already changing into gold, larches were passing from lemon into dead squirrel colour—elder trees were tufted green, and though the hedges were still brown, thorn bushes in sheltered places were vivid emerald. Daffodils had already crooked their spears in the orchards, forsythia and pyrus japonica were in full bloom. Spring seemed to be here a good month before its time.

“There’ll be nea fruit t’year I’s e thinking,” said the dalesman. “Why do you say so?” I interjected. “Because there’s nea snaw up on tops and that means there’s nea frost o’neets to keep things back. But it’ll hev to coom, and it’ll likely be just as t’fruit is set and damsons ’ll be hard to coom by I’s e doubting.”

The dalesman had experience on his side, his calendar is punctuated by “Snaw ont’tops.” He never feels it safe to send sheep to the fells till the last snow wreath has faded. Snow lingers on the tops far into May, and deep recesses “keep till June November’s snow,” as Wordsworth knew.

As I looked up to Helvellyn’s height, there was no trace of white winter from one end of the range to the other. Its great flanks basked in the sunshine, and its purple shales, intermingled with rusty patches of bracken, shone like a mosaic of amethyst and cornelian, while from the

public road rose up beneath this wall of colour the Japanese larch woods, as rusty-red as the bracken. But with evening there came heavy rain, and in the morning the becks in the valley were loud. By noon the rain had ceased, and the old mild and dry spring weather seemed to have returned. The rooks knew better. They swung up into middle sky and tossed themselves hither and thither in wild clamour that betokened change. But the barometer paid no attention to their antics, and steadily mounted upwards. Imagine then the surprise, for all but the rooks, to find on our awakening next morning that a fall of snow 3in. deep had taken place, and that vale and wood and mountain-side were whiter than we had seen them since the first week of the New Year.

In ordinary snowfalls the trees stand out jet-black, the rocks on the steep fell sides jet-black, the walls in vale and on mountain-side jet-black. The heather patches lie brown, the bracken deep red against white backgrounds. But to-day the whole scene was dead-white, every tree stood as if a sudden hoar-frost had transfigured it; even the Scotch firs had lost their dark blue-green. So impalpably fine had been the snow-dust, so windlessly had it fallen, there was not a single branch to the innermost heart of the tree but was clad with whiteness. More beautiful than hoar-frost witchery had been this transformation. Every bud, every twig, was powdered with radiant garniture, and because at the call of spring the purple woodland had swollen its leaf buds well nigh to bursting, the massiveness of the trees under the new fallen snow was a sight to see. The snow powdering gave individuality to all tree-growth. The beech, the horse-chestnut, seemed to have all their branch twigs standing straight up to heaven; the birch and elms were plumed and fluffy—their budding twigs were gathered into balls of dome-shaped beauty; the larches appeared to be of huge milk-white feather growth. The laurels, not weighed down as in ordinary snowfall, stood massy-roofed and tent-like. As for the telegraph wires beside the road, these seemed as large as electric cables and hung festooned from post to post.



IN THE VALLEY OF THE KENNET

Not a bird sang. Not a sheep cried from the meadows ; they lifted sad faces that had the appearance of white masks, and disconsolately moved unfed from slope to slope. A squirrel leapt up a tree-trunk, fell backward half blinded by the snowfall, and tried again ; then as it sprang from branch to branch, it seemed dazed by the avalanche of snow, and leaping downward scampered off, glad to be on terra firma again. A blackbird darted with cry from the snow-white roof of the laurel bush, almost out of its mind for fright at the deluge which it caused.

Not yet had sun-radiance flushed the vale, but I can never forget the magnificence added to every tree when it rose above the snow-cloud and filled the valley with dazzling splendour. Meanwhile blue sky hung above the lake, and where a light wind stirred it the lake was turned into a sheet of grey steel tinct with sapphire, but in windless bays the water lay an ebon-black mirror and the white trees stood double by the shore.

Slowly but surely beneath the sun's warmth the vision of beauty faded ; the birches shed their loveliness in sheets of white dust, from oak and ash the beauty fell in handfuls to the ground, the grass appeared in emerald circles round each tree-stem, the woods began to put on all their purples again. As for the mountain slopes, the walls first reappeared in jet-black jewelry, then the rocks put on their ebon hue, next the brackens began to flush and glow through the snowfall, but still unsullied lay the snow-field on the heights, and the blue of heaven, the peculiar gift of March, shone bluer than before by reason of the snow foil beneath.

The larch groves, yellow-red again, seemed dull by contrast with their dazzling backgrounds. But spring had reasserted itself in the valley before sunset, and the birds sang as if winter was over, and nesting-time was sure. And man as well as bird was glad ; the dalesman felt that damson time was also sure.

GREY WETHERS

When spring first comes to the downs it is pleasant to go up into the remote valleys which have been steeped in lofty silence winter-long. So, too, the children think who on Saturdays and Sundays may be found far from the elm-sheltered thatched cottages in the vale—far up in the hills. With the first warm spring days some wandering impulse seems to draw them forth ; not the flower-picking, for late summer is the season of the down flowers ; not birds'-nesting either, for only plover, rook, and wood pigeon nest up there. It is perhaps the reaction after winter, the sense of new freedom, space, and lengthening days, and that through many months the downland world has been a closed book to all save the shepherds.

But one valley the children never visit. It lies far back from the old Western highway, and though in the midst of a land of prehistoric remains is not to be distinguished at first from many another long shallow " bottom " of the same kind. These " bottoms " almost unknowingly and imperceptibly enfold the wanderer. He is suddenly lost to the world. He sees before him the valley narrowly winding between encroaching green shoulders of the down and plods on, making as his mark some grey stone cattle shelter, some thatched shepherd's cottage, some hay or straw stack or—merely the open sky. At first plough, mustard, or sprouting winter corn in broad open sweeps accompanies his way ; then the immemorial turf. The turf that is green, springy, slippery, living almost—alive with fossil shells, with creamy orchis and yellow bedstraw, with minute relics of that which has long since

vanished to nothing—the most beautiful of carpets. And then he is alone. All the wide, spacious world has faded. Even the inlet and the exit seem to have disappeared, and the wanderer stands in a long, narrow compartment of which the steep green slopes are the walls and the ceiling is the sky above. And it would seem that he can only emerge by climbing those walls. Suddenly he finds himself at the head of the valley where it broadens out. And there amid bleak thorn trees the grey wethers lie. It is this queer, lone, quiet place, where sun and shadow wheel and chase, where no sound comes but the pat-pat and skip of the rabbits and the slow, patient burrowing of the mole and the long-drawn sigh of the wind.

For the stones lie prostrate—of all shapes, at all angles, in all attitudes, as it were, some blunt-headed and oblong, some sharp, some flat, some moss-grown green, some grey and smooth, some standing bolt upright sentinel-wise, and some half-sunk as grave-slabs in the all-encroaching turf, and some just peeping through. So that the illusion is of an old battlefield and suggests the scene of superhuman conflict in the dawn of history, when giants fought and fell, lay, petrified, and were forgotten.

All around the moles have tunnelled, casting up little mounds of soil which are a blot upon the green purity of turf. All around rabbits have burrowed and sit and watch and dart and run at the stranger's approach. In their solitude they have no fear of man. There stands beside the trackway which leads down the valley-bottom a cairn of raised stones. A monument? A tomb? A sepulchre? An altar? It stands by itself out of sight of the grey wethers—two great sarsen-uprights over 8ft. high, and a great cross-stone and a lesser upright. Through the centre passage-way the wind makes an eternal singing like the sound made by the echo of the waves in a seaside cave. In this centre-space was found the skeleton of a rabbit many years old. That is all.

The supernatural and the mysterious are always fearful though provocative to children. And the supernatural speaks strongly in this isolation, this solemn lonely magnificence,

this inscrutability. So the children call the cairn of stones the Devil's Den, and are threatened with its evil spell from earliest infancy, and dread it more than the grey wethers at the head of the valley. Of these there is no story. But of the Devil's Den there are many stories : for is it not well known that if water be poured into the hollows of the roof-stone it will be drained to the last drop by morning ? Contrariwise, the Devil himself wants to pull it down ; for which purpose he arrives at midnight with four yoke of white oxen, and makes his futile endeavour while the white rabbit with the burning coals for eyes looks on from the high cross-stone.

But what, after all, is one mystery among so many ? One valley among many valleys, each with its stones, its cromlech, its cist-vaen or sarsens, its mound or barrow or temple-ring. For the valley of the grey wethers is not isolated but rather the introductory corridor to a world stretching back aeons beyond the recorded history of man. The dyke, the vallum and fosse, the conical hill, the low embankment, the cup-like depressions, the broad terraces on the steep hillside, the little worn footpaths, and even the varying shades of light on the upland grass—these have their history. But since the onward movement of the lower tertiary strata strewed them here, the grey wethers have had no history unless it be of those their fellows carried hence in prehistoric times to rear Stonehenge or of those others which, reft from their solitude, bear the weight of crowded modern life in Windsor Bridge to-day.

For the rest, the valley of the grey wethers bespeaks no change. Handiwork of man has been and gone, and left no trace. Moon and wind and snow and Age himself have left no trace. Sun and shadow wheel a-wheel and noonday passes toward night, only to return again. Overhead the clouds flit by—an endless procession. Presently the bees come droning after the wild thyme. The mirage of the summer heat descends. Small flowers, blue and yellow and white, spring up about the feet of the old grey stones. Happy to be prisoner in such a place !

THE ENEMIES OF GAME

As the nesting season approaches gamekeepers pursue relentlessly those creatures of the wild that prey upon their fellows. It is truly a case of the stitch in time that saves nine. The spring is the mating time for all the animal world, game and vermin alike, and although a litter of nine may be rather a large order, even for the prolific stoat, the death of one of the tribe now renders future "encumbrances" impossible.

Vermin may be roughly divided into two classes : the habitual criminals, such as stoats, weasels, sparrow-hawks, hooded crows, jays, and magpies ; and those which occasionally lapse from virtue, as cats, rats, rooks, and hedgehogs. But the dividing line is not very sharply drawn. *Facilis descensus Averno*, and once the lapse has occurred the right path is seldom recovered. The domestic cat turned poacher too often becomes an "habitual" of the most virulent type, and the rook that has acquired a taste for eggs develops uncanny cleverness in gratifying it. The following incident, described to me by a trustworthy observer, bears upon the point.

A hen having taken up its abode in a hedge-row, a nest egg was placed there to encourage it. Finding on successive mornings that the imitation egg had been moved to a little distance, the owner kept watch, and was rewarded by seeing a rook rolling away the deceptive object with vigorous pecks. The egg was put back in the same place, and next morning was nowhere to be seen. But the hollow where the hen was accustomed to sit showed signs of recent disturbance, and on further investigation

the nest egg was found hidden under leaves and sticks. The rook, which thus showed its resentment at a fraud, was evidently a bird of character. Hooded crows are determined enemies of game, and though, fortunately, not very common in agricultural districts, they work sad havoc on the moors. In spite of their vulture-like habits—they will peck out the eyes of “cast” sheep—hooded crows are not wanting in affection for their own kind. A shepherd, having caught a young “hoodie,” tethered it by a long string in his garden. The captive escaped, and was found later, with the string still tied to it, in a nest with four other young ones. Old birds must have helped it to gain a lodgment in the nest. Hooded crows are such wary creatures that trapping and shooting are inadequate means of destruction when they are numerous. Poison is often used for the purpose, and, if judiciously placed, should not be dangerous to other creatures on the open moors.

But the stoat and weasel are indisputably the villains of the woodland piece. For they do not kill merely to satisfy their own appetites, or those of their young, but for the sake of killing. The bloodthirsty little monsters “see red” and kill without sense or stint. I knew a case of some 50 young pheasants being killed in a forenoon by a single stoat ; it was caught and promptly dispatched. They are distinguished easily, the weasel being considerably the smaller, and its short tail being without the black tip which distinguishes the longer-tailed stoat. This animal, by the way, is identically the same as the ermine, the difference in colouration being due to climate. When wintering once in the Canadian backwoods the writer often saw ermines prowling round the frozen larder—a side of bacon or haunch of deer hung up outside the “shack”—and was reminded irresistibly of British Law Courts. Benevolent naturalists will tell you that stoats and weasels feed chiefly upon rats and mice, and, therefore, should be regarded as the farmer’s friends. But, though there is undoubtedly some truth in this contention, the keeper has quite another tale to

tell. Of all vermin, these creatures are the most destructive to game. Fortunately they are not very hard to trap—by means of tunnel traps placed in drains which they are known to frequent.

And what of the fox, whose existence in woodlands is incompatible with that of pheasants—if we are to believe some of the men who wear velvetens and carry guns under their arms? Hunting men, on the other hand, will tell you that the fox is a much maligned animal, often blamed for deeds of darkness due to other marauders. An enthusiast may even suggest that the chief hope of the country lies in the better preservation of foxes, since only thus can the breed of high-class horses be maintained and cavalry officers become efficient. However this may be, the fox undoubtedly prefers fur to feather, as being more easily procured and furnishing a more satisfying meal. No doubt it preys also upon winged game, and on poultry as well, where procurable. It has a nice taste in eggs, and shows considerable ingenuity in conveying them to its larder. In the Highlands of Scotland foxes are shot on sight. A Glenisla keeper who had killed one found that it was carrying two eggs, one on each side, between the lips outside the teeth.

There is little to choose between jays and magpies. They have their good points; most creatures have; and among the insects they devour noxious kinds are doubtless numbered. But both work havoc among game eggs and nestlings, and are rightly included in the keeper's black list. A trap baited with an egg often tempts to their doom both jays and magpies. Some may think that rats should be included among the "habituals," but, responsible though they are for enormous losses when living in stackyards and in dock and other warehouses where grain and produce are stored, the writer inclines to think that their sins against game are exaggerated. They are, it is true, omnivorous. When vegetable food is hard to find they take with equal relish eggs or young birds. Nothing comes amiss to them. But as a rule rats do not greatly frequent woodlands, and are probably

more dangerous to farmyard poultry than to game. Seemingly an inoffensive animal, the hedgehog often develops a taste for game eggs. A keeper who was blamed for shooting a hedgehog was justified at a subsequent autopsy, for its stomach was found to contain a quantity of egg débris.

Among the enemies of game, human poachers must be included. In bygone times noted poachers enjoyed the same kind of popularity North of the Border that famous knights of the road did in England. It is told of a shepherd employed on a Perthshire farm that he arrived one day in company with a stalwart, well-dressed stranger. "Wha's your freend?" asked the farmer. "Juist Willie Macleish, the poacher," was the reply. Duly impressed by the honour conferred on him, the farmer produced the whisky and entertained the poacher to the best of his ability; but he rather grudged his hospitality on discovering later that a fine stock of rabbits had almost disappeared from his ground.

WHERE THERE IS NO COAL

Fortunatos sua si bona norint—to the inhabitants of the Outer Hebrides coal is almost unknown. Their fuel is peat, supplemented with driftwood, which during the War was extraordinarily abundant, but has since greatly decreased.

The peat is a product of the islands. Great stretches of bog-land abound, and on much of it sphagnum moss grows. This moss—well known during the War for its antiseptic properties—is constantly dying, and fresh plants grow on the remains beneath. In course of centuries a deep layer of dead moss plants is formed, and by pressure from above the dead mosses, with roots and particles of soil, are squeezed into an almost solid dark substance—peat. The best peat is many thousands of years old. It is, when cut and dried, jet black, and hard as iron. Its ash when burnt is quite white.

Not every peat moss produces the best peat ; in fact, the peats that one usually sees are brown, comparatively soft and easily broken. They burn readily, but there is not the same body in them, and their heat lasts but a short time. Their ash is red-brown.

The digging of the peat, or *foid* as it is known to the Gaelic-speaking islanders, begins with the first fine weather of May. A skilled man may cut 5,000 peats in a day, but the weather must be fine, for the longer the peats remain out on the bog the less well they dry. In a warm week perhaps they are half dry, and are then stood on end in threes and fours. If the weather is perfect they are ready for carting within a fortnight, but the islanders think themselves fortunate if they secure them in a month.

It is a pretty sight to watch the work at a peat moss on a fine July day. The whole village turns out to carry the dried peats to the roadside, where they are piled in great stacks. If the island is Barra, famous for its ponies, the islanders converse animatedly in the Gaelic tongue as they toil. Old men are there, young fellows, old women and young girls. It is partly a holiday. The girls are clean, and neatly dressed with coloured kerchiefs over their heads. In the early afternoon in various parts of the peat moss or moine one sees many fires lighted. A little heather to start the peats, and soon cheerful glowing embers emit a blue aromatic smoke. On these little fires kettles are boiled, and tea is brewed and drunk with rich cream and well-baked scones and oatcakes.

In time the stacks are transferred to the village ; each crofter's house has, before winter, a well-built stack to last through the wild weather and long dreary evenings. A peat fire is easy to keep going. Day and night on the open hearth it glows. It is rare indeed that it is allowed to die out, for without heather or wood to kindle it, it is almost impossible to get going again. In these primitive dwellings there is sometimes no chimney, but only minute windows, through which the peat smoke escapes. The room is so filled with pungent smoke that a stranger's eyes will water copiously, and soon he will have to go outside to recuperate. The smell remains in his hair and clothes for weeks ; that is why Harris tweed retains its scent for years.

There is no peat on the populous Hebridean island of Tiree ; it used to be fetched by sea from Mull, 20 miles distant—a dangerous passage ; but now Tiree burns nothing but coal, a year's supply being landed on that island without a harbour in fine summer weather.

THE MARCH WIND'S PAGEANT

Spring unfolds with a wholesome slowness, while night and day are raked by the March east wind. The buds that swelled so quickly in the first mild days of the month are again quiescent : few wild flowers have burst their sheaths, and only the tree-tops are busy with the mating of catkins in the wind. Catkins are not confined to the cold and windy months, but they are peculiarly characteristic of them, and they give them an almost uncanny interest. Even the lank "lamb's-tails" which still drape the hazels seem more appropriate to the studied convention of a willow-pattern plate than to simple English hedgerows ; and most other catkins, more proper to March, are unexpected both in shape and colour. The most marked change from bare winter boughs has overtaken the rounded crowns of the white poplars, which are densely packed with stout catkins, like sleek fingers. Black poplars drop their male catkins, "curly caterpillarlike," even on town pavements, as if to lure the unobservant to watch the tree-tops before the leaves expand. Only the male catkins of the hornbeam yet mimic the natural hue of budding foliage. Already the groves of that little known tree are beginning to vivify the dark ridges of Epping Forest with tenderest green. But the black poplar's caterpillars are almost blood-red ; the aspen's, as they expand, gleam silver ; and the black-coned alders by the riverside are powdered with a strange shade—like that of no leaves, even in autumn, and very few blossoms—which in some paint-boxes is called light red.

Catkin-time is the annual recapitulation of a very ancient page of history. In these windy weeks, when

petalled and scented wild flowers are still few, nature is celebrating once more the plants' nuptials according to an older dispensation. Except in gardens, and where the sallow-catkins call the bees, there is little yet of all that complicated modern system of bribing insects to mate blossoms with which, in outline at any rate, we are all familiar. Sallow-catkins have adapted themselves to the new fashion ; they attract bees and butterflies by bright colour, moths by sweet scent at night, and reward all by draughts of nectar. But in the windier tree-tops nature keeps to the old blind way. The living dust is sifted on the breeze, to quicken the waiting germ—sometimes housed, as in the hornbeam, on the same tree, but sometimes on one separate. There is a deep impressiveness in this ancient, unspecialized method of vegetable procreation, which dates, as we may infer, from a time when flowers and insects as we know them had scarcely developed. To watch the March gusts send the yellow yew-pollen flying is almost like watching the great primeval lizards creep up from the drying sloughs by the river, and crop the grass with huge, horned heads. Doubtless the end of the wind's rule over plants' mating was not abrupt ; and amid the gleams and greyness of the March landscape we still find traces of compromise. The golden sallow, or palm-willow, is a catkin-bearing plant which attracts and utilizes insects. All know those golden knobs, but fewer the profuse March blossom of the elms, which floods them with crimson in sunlight. The elm bears flowers approaching the normal pattern, but relies upon the wind to mate them.

The dragons of the Lyme Regis mudhills perished so long ago that no human eye saw them living. That fact eliminates the suggestion that legends of dragons were based on some glimpse of the last vast saurian nodding in fen or cave. But if the ancient dragons did rise to stalk the English soil, it is surely among the drying March meadows that we might expect to meet them. There is something uncanny, and eminently fit for great reptiles, about these wide and oozy pastures barely emerged from



HAWTHORN BLOOM AT WOTTON

their bath of winter flood. The squeamish shun them, and sicken at their froggish smell ; but they are not to be missed by those who love nature in its most significant aspects. Here too, among these half-dried pools, tagged and sheeted with green algae quickly bleaching—here, as in the elm-tops murmuring where the land rises, we have the annual rehearsal of an immensely ancient pageant. It is plausibly claimed that the greatest landmark in the ascent of man was when the frog first found a voice and left the waters. Some fish can grunt, but the first love-song came from the first amphibian. To this day frogs have never reached full terrestrial status. Every March they must drop their spawn in the pools, in order that their tadpoles shall live over again the fishy part of their lives before emerging into the sweet May mowing-grass. Only here and there in England, and later, as a rule, than in March, can we hear the authentic Aristophanic “ Bre-ke-ke-kech, kwaach, kwaach ” vibrating from among the forget-me-not and watercress, as the large green edible frog swells his throat-sacs, like cherries. But the croak of our own common grass-frog suggests still more vividly the first development of a voice on dry land ; and though that green snake—a true reptile—again is dumb, but for an inarticulate hiss, the skylarks warbling above us are themselves but highly modified reptiles.

A LINCOLNSHIRE LAKE

There are, or might be, trout in most waters ; but, at first sight, Lincolnshire appears an unlikely county in which to find them. At any rate, no one would pay £200 a mile for fishing in any of those sluggish, winding streams fringed with pollard willows ; and if there are ponds, or even lakes, one's thoughts would turn to pike and perch and bream rather than trout.

But in one corner of Lincolnshire, the name of which shall not here be divulged, there is a ridge of limestone rocks, and wherever there is limestone there are the right water weeds, which hold the right trout food, which nourish the trout and feed him to fatness. And from a chink in the rock there springs full fledged such a stream that at its very source it runs, except in the driest of seasons, a ram for the great house. Then it flows into three lakes of deep, gin-clear water, and, after rambling merrily like a North-Country beck through a delightful park, is absorbed in one of the willow-fringed, dull, staid, meandering rivers aforesaid and loses all interest from the trout-fisher's point of view.

But the Lakes—the Upper, the Middle, and the Lower—are, or were, full of great trout and provide the most entrancing problems for the fisherman. Before the War they were carefully kept. The weeds were not allowed to grow, the dead branches were pulled out, the trout were protected when spawning on the bright gravel streams between the lakes, the otters and the herons were kept down, fresh blood was introduced every other year, and a careful record was kept of the catch. Now the trees have

grown up and entirely fringe one shore, making it impossible to approach. And the weeds cover the surface, except for a few round holes which the wind can never ruffle, so that a boat cannot travel. As a matter of fact the boats have rotted and could not be used if it was any good. And the banks have been neglected and the land drainage, so that the difficulties of the fisherman are much increased ; and, indeed, ordinary methods of fishing are impossible.

Still and all, the trout are there, not, perhaps, so many or so big as before. The otter and the heron take their toll, but as the stream, like that of Moses, springs clean from the rock there is no pollution ; and, as it is so difficult to get trout-fishing now, the chance of a day is eagerly accepted, and the fisherman is on his mettle to overcome the difficulties. The Middle Lake's shore is a jungle of trees and bushes—beech, elder, alder, holly, and the rest. No casting, no orthodox methods, are possible ; and, indeed, for dapping, the only chance, it is first necessary to clear a space with the billhook, to get the point of the rod through. The weeds do not grow under the branches, and there is a space of clean water, about six feet wide, from which some trout hasten away while the clearing operations go on. Never mind ; from the branches of the big trees, which one cannot touch, the caterpillars descend, and under them the alders and other flies play, and the trout will come back. But, to give them time, we go, when the clearing is finished, to the Upper Lake. There also are great beech trees ; but the shore is the edge of a pasture field, and there is no undergrowth. The boughs stretch over the water, and, peeping cautiously round the trunk, we see four or five trout, from $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. to 2lb., swimming backwards and forwards in the space which is clear of weeds. The problem is to get down the steep bank, pull the rod, with the line held firmly in the hand, under one bough and over another, and then release the (alder) fly, so that it hangs over the water at a reasonable distance, over the fish without frightening them—or another party which is suddenly observed lower down the Lake.

Slowly, and with great caution, the manoeuvre is executed, and the fisherman, who has taken care to keep the tree stem behind him, is squatting precariously on the lowest bough, holding out the rod point. The line is released, but he has miscalculated the length of line required, and the fly drops on a beech spray and sticks. Happily, only on a leaf, and a twitch frees it ; but it is too long, and a foot or more of gut lies on the water. Slowly he pulls in the line. Will the knot between cast and line stick in the rings of the rod ? With a slight jerk it goes through ; and the fly dangles an inch above the water—the hand trembling with excitement, which gives an added attraction to the fly—and only one smallish fish, which had been nearer in shore than the others, frightened. The others continue their leisurely cruising, taking an occasional fly. What with excitement and perspiration, the fisherman can hardly see to distinguish his fly from the others on the water—not a bad thing, perhaps, for he knows that, if he watches his fly too close, and strikes too soon, with this kind of fishing he will only scratch his fish. Meanwhile, he notes that he cannot strike upwards in the ordinary way, as there is a branch above his rod ; he must strike sideways ; he cannot give more than a few yards of line, or the fish will be in the weeds outside ; and, as the line is already so short, he will have to land his fish by moving the rod back, and sideways, for the high bank is immediately behind him. Now his eyes are clearer, and he looks at his fly just in time to lift it from the surface as a small fish comes for it ; he wants the big ones.

Another wait with outstretched arm, which is getting very tired. Then a sizeable fish sees the alder making pleasant dimples six inches inshore of him, turns half-left, and opens his mouth. With superhuman self-control, the fisherman's arm is kept still ; the trout turns again, the rod is slightly turned sideways, and the fish, firmly hooked, after a decent fight, though without much law, is brought to the net, “ according to plan.” He is not so big as some of the shoal, which have now scattered, but is a full half-pound. Flushed and triumphant, the fisherman

staggers up the bank and walks up the meadow, past the ruined boathouse, to where the old stone bridge takes the carriage drive across the narrow neck at the top of the lake.

After luncheon the cleared spaces in the Middle Lake are tried. Sometimes the arm is held out till it is weary, and no fish comes. Sometimes he comes and is scratched. Sometimes the fly sticks, and extrication frightens the fish. Always a new problem and fresh methods of approach. And if five or six fish are caught, of which two or three are over $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and are kept, the fisherman has had a day of which every minute is a lesson—and a pleasure.

TO FINISH THE SEASON

It is indeed a wonder how people manage to hunt nowadays, when country houses are standing empty, farms are derelict, main roads are skating rinks, and hundreds of thousands of new small houses cover what were then green fields. Hunting in Leicestershire and with the other famous packs of course goes on, as we know from the papers, as keenly as ever. But Leicestershire was always for rich men ; the local folk hunted as a matter of course, but there was always a fashionable crowd of visitors. There are still plenty of rich men and women, and Leicestershire in the winter is still the fashion.

But the provincial packs—how do they exist ? The old Mudshire, for instance, where we had so many happy days, now that the Duke's castle is turned into an hotel and half-a-dozen other great houses into schools or convents : with all the new factories round Muddleton (one on the site of a famous covert), with the main roads—and we did a lot of hunting on the roads—covered with motor-cars like Piccadilly ?

Let us meet the Mudshire “ to finish the season ” at Mudford Wood, and see for ourselves : not without some trepidation, for, unless the horse so kindly offered us is a very easy ride, we foresee a terrible stiffness in unaccustomed muscles for many days afterwards.

We know Mudford Wood of old—a famous haunt of foxes always, in spite of its nearness to the town : many acres of thick brushwood, old straggling gorse and brambles, with narrow, badly kept rides where the going is always bad. In former days the commoners, who had

rights of firewood, used to keep some places fairly clear ; now they are dying out, and most of it seems almost impenetrable. But the foxes are still there. We meet to-day to try to account for one which is badly wanted for fowl murder. If he is of the old breed he is not likely to leave the wood ; and we don't much wish that he will, as it is getting rather late to ride the open country. It will be hunting rather than chasing, and therefore easier for veteran novices. The wood looks much the same as we ride up, but one new sight is ominous : a large signboard with "Mudford Estate, Eligible Building Sites," and three new erections, part villa and part bungalow, with wired-in enclosures already squalid with cabbages and old tins ; trees have been felled in one corner of the wood, scrub cleared, and a gravelled road laid in a line which shows that more bungalows are intended. The end of Mudford Wood and of Mudford Wood foxes is in sight ?

But here are hounds, the great powerful bitches (you must have big hounds to get through the Mudshire country), trained very fine after their heavy season. And the staff, neat and cheerful, on their useful, stocky horses—you don't want thoroughbreds here. But it strikes you that the Hunt horses, and those of the field, look better class than they used to be ; perhaps the habit of long tails has something to do with it, or is it that, now that horses are wanted for little but hunting and racing, it does not pay to breed anything but the best ? A few faces that one recognizes, but mostly strangers. Plenty of red coats and tops, though with black it seems the fashion to wear cord or tweed breeches and butcher boots. The chief novelty is the number of astride ladies, some looking neat and workmanlike, some the reverse (surely only a slim woman should ride astride ?), though there is at least one lady in a habit and a top-hat.

After drawing some outlying coverts blank we plunge into the great wood, where we are to spend the day. Hounds speak to a line almost at once. The wood always holds a scent, but its extent is so great, and there are often so many foxes, that even the huntsman must sometimes

doubt whether they have not changed. The field frankly cannot know ; but it is a treat to us old stagers to watch the huntsman, patient, persevering, always close (or as close as he can get) to his hounds, never disturbing them unnecessarily or lifting them to the numerous and often ignorant holloas. Up and down the soggy rides we pound, first one way, then back on our tracks, always splashed copiously with our own and other people's mud. A heavy shower drenches us and drowns scent for a time. Then the cry is heard again, this time at the edge of the wood, and we scurry towards them as fast as we may round the narrow rides, to find that hounds are across the road, out of the main wood, and away to a chain of small coverts where, with a fair scent, there is a chance of catching a tired fox. And he is tired. The skill and perseverance of the huntsman have kept hounds on to the same fox, it is clear, most of the day, and he cannot face the open. Nor, when he doubles back, can he reach the great wood and safety again : he is rolled over just before he gets there, and the chickens are avenged.

Not a day for the thruster, but very grateful and reassuring to the veteran, who has seen a triumph of hound work, and who goes home happy to find that hounds can still be well handled, and foxes accounted for, in spite of motors, and slippery roads, and wire round eligible building plots. And he is glad to know that ordinary people can still hunt, and still know enough about hunting to enjoy a hunt like this.

THE GRAVES OF OLD RIVERS

Chalk down scenery owes a peculiar fascination to its system of dead rivers. As we strike among the grey-green hills in early April to meet the first exultant wheatears, or to watch the crowning of the first magpies' nests, we see how the deep combs and ridges are the result of no casual folding, but have been carved by steep and violent streams. All the detail is still here but the water—the tributaries winding from the crests, their confluence into broader green-paved channels, which meet at last in one wide, steep-sided river floor, swinging from the hills out to the sea beach or the lowlands.

Spring's new life has a greater charm for this ancient and mysterious setting. The deep folds which seam the chalk hills are of two kinds and appear to date from two different ages. Most of these many-armed rivers have plainly been scooped out by furious rain, or thaw, while the downs covered approximately their present area. Time after time, both in the narrower Sussex downs and the wider belt of Wiltshire and Berkshire, we follow a dead stream to its topmost source, and find a steep semi-circular hollow within a few hundred yards of the scarp where the downs break away into the Weald or the Midlands. One of the most striking of all these dry stream heads lies close beneath Walbury Hill—the highest point of the Berkshire and Wiltshire downs—and the gallows which is, or for long was, maintained by the tenant of the farm lying in the stream bed beneath it. It seems clear that such streams began their course so near to the hills' edge, but no nearer, because just so wide a gathering ground for rain

or melted snow was necessary to give birth to them. In those years of torrential rain or violent post-glacial thaws the edge of the hills must have been practically where it is now. But other gaps cut clean through some of our chalk hills. Some, like the valleys of the Adur and Ouse in the South Downs, are now occupied by a river, while in others, like the low passes through the Chiltern Hills at Wendover and Princes Risborough, the crest of the gap is now dry and is followed by a modern high-road.

Many roads avail themselves of these immensely ancient through routes, which, as far as we can read the past, were the paths of greater rivers flowing over wider tracts of chalk when the Berkshire Downs and the Chiltern Hills spread far across the Midlands and the North and South Downs were all one. But roads avoid the heads of the less ancient valleys, which lead not to an easy gap, but to a heart-breaking hill ; and the whole course of these branched and winding combes is a nursery of wild life. In several of the chalk counties the upper coasts of the dry gullies are still the haunt of the thick-knee or stone curlew. Already its wild nocturnal cry may have been heard above Imber, or in the Ilsley Downs. Wheatears delight in the rabbit warrens which abound on these dry beds of vanished waters. In some of the Berkshire valleys the association of the wheatear and the rabbit for the summer season is as regular and as amicable as that of the little burrowing owl and the prairie dog on the western plains. Beneath Cissbury a group of stream beds uniting to flow out past Lancing is half filled with a brake of whitethorns and elders and junipers—a richer woodland vestment than often clothes the wind-swept chalk. Year by year these lonely thickets of berry-bearing bushes are a stronghold of migrant fieldfares at nearly the southernmost limit of their winter wanderings on English soil. Often as the first wheatears return to the barer reaches of the combes, they hear from the green-flecked thickets the wild spring babble of these northern thrushes, on fire with their own imminent migration. Early one April, cold and adverse winds had delayed the wheatears under Cissbury, but large flocks of many



BLUEBELLS IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

hundred fieldfares perched, blue as wood-pigeons, among the ruddy spring lustre on the thorn boughs, and chanted with their harsh notes of November already changed into the rudiments of a song.

These brakes in the combes under Cissbury owe part of the stoutness of their timber to the shelter of the ancient stream-torn dingles, and part to a rich admixture of soil of a later age than the chalk which lies on the downs at the streams' heads, and at which they were still tearing when they died. But lusty as are the thorn stems, compared with most down growths, they furnish holes of no great size for nesting. When we hear the half gull-like cry of the little owl, which has spread hither as almost everywhere in the south, we wonder whether in the lack of crannied timber he will choose some old magpie's nest, like the long-eared owl, or possibly follow the mode of his own western cousin and make terms for himself and his wife as lodgers with some respectable rabbit. Rabbits in this and other chalk districts have become one of the main modern instruments of erosion, almost comparable with the pre-historic torrents. The soil of the warrens is carious with their burrows, caving beneath us as we tread. Very swiftly, for a secular movement, they are crumbling the flint-filled concrete of the hilltops and levelling out the combes. Next to the little owls, which came but yesterday, rabbits are the newest of all forms of life in the stream beds—much newer than man. If we ask for the oldest, we shall find it—not alive, indeed, but strangely lifelike—in the flinty cast of the fossil sea-urchin that lies where a stone-bed shelters the first pale blue dog-violets. This starred pebble crept alive on the sea floor in which these chalk hills lay making, and beneath its rind of brittle prickles a modern sea-urchin at low-water mark is almost the same beast still.

THE POINT-TO-POINT

Those hills on the north-western edge of Wessex must have made, in ancient wars, superb places from which a sentinel might have watched the country for movements of an enemy force, as they must also well have served a rearguard covering the retirement of an army stricken on the plains and seeking shelter behind the ridge. How the pursuing soldiery, their ranks now broken by a tumbling boulder, now checked by a flight of arrows, must have cursed the steep sides of the hills, slippery with grass, barren of cover from sling or bow.

Deep, indeed, is the stillness that hangs about them now, but there is one hill among the rest upon the forward slope of which, on one day in the year, a multitude yet gathers. For this is still a place of vantage from which to study every movement in the valley below. And thus the judgment of the long-vanished sentry is unconsciously endorsed by every one of those who, on a Saturday in the spring of the year, climb to the top of the green grandstand the better to follow the fortunes of riders and horses in the point-to-point through the vale below.

It is an astonishing crowd that comes to see this event. It is utterly unlike most racecourse crowds, in the important particular that most of those who compose it really know what they are talking about—the character and qualities of horses. The mass is actually more interested in horses than in odds and the paddock gossip is a thing informed. And the point-to-point is a picnic that has been prepared for and talked about for weeks in advance. You may go to it in a gig or a motor-car or a lorry. Enthusiasm sufficiently

high will even bear one there on one's feet—if they are really well shod and the weather is kindly. The walk then is entirely worth while.

On the gentler slope of the green hill there are tents in a meadow where they sell cakes and ale. There is a great array of parked motor-cars, and half the space in every one of them seems to be filled with lunch. There are flags, red and white, that mark out the course down below, and there is no railway station within miles and miles. The bookmakers are on the crest of the hill ; but they are only incidental and slightly more important than the " Crown and Anchor " men.

Racing begins in the afternoon, when the sandwiches are nearly gone and the flasks are empty. Then opinion, in a burr that renders speech almost incomprehensible to the stranger, is voiced upon the merits of a string of good-looking horses that move presently, with careful and unhurried stride, down the easier slope of the hill, through a spinney flanking a near meadow, and so out to the starting point. So far as this, the first race, is concerned, the last venturesome half-crown has been hazarded ; the race itself is the thing ; it will provide real riding and a fine call on nerves and knees.

The cluster of riders in pink or black shows half a mile away through the bare trees, forms itself into a line, moves forward, moves backward, hesitates, and starts away. Your neighbour will name the owner of the first half-dozen meadows through which the bay or the chestnut is leading the rest ; he may even know the height of the hedge that separates the dun field from the green one, and so adroitly judges the possibility of the roan mare clearing it without a spill. He probably knows, too, the depth of the brook at this time of the year—as at all times—the brook that provides the water jump. And, while he has been talking, horses and men have gone away into the blue of the afternoon, have swung round the corner of a wood and reappeared.

Hedges, fences, and ditches have sorted out the bunch and made a string of it. Hard going, where the soil is

soggy, has knocked yards off the pace. Pink and black and brown through the trees, the flickering movement a mile away grows more defined as the flying hoofs throw up great clods of earth, and horses, that a moment since appeared to crawl, come flinging down the valley, over the thorns, and straight for the water jump that is so near to home, and, for those who refuse, so far away. Here the leader thrusts a pair of obstinate feet into the crumbling bank, flings back with a pettish gesture, and tries again. Here the lean-flanked chestnut, mud-splashed and sweating, gathers every sinew to a harp-string tautness, and is over and heading for the ancient farm-cart where at the winning post the judges sit.

And behind are the downs, blue and grey and green, blotched with yellow, rolling away into the sky ; older than anything that can be imagined and, by sheer attraction of shape and colour, lifting the consciousness of whoever looks on them above and beyond the passing fretfulness in the valley and his imagination to the things that lie beyond. But the inconstant mind comes hurtling back to the last hedge and the hundred yards of clean turf where the black is gathering three inches in every stride from the brown. Back on the hill-crest a man with a hoarse voice may be handing somebody a five-pound note, albeit with no very good grace.

THE OLD TRAPPER

Old Reuben, who ekes out his old-age pension with odd jobs about the farm, as he comes through the fold-yard in the dusk, stops by the granary door at the sight of a little scatter of wood-chips along the sill and a hollow scratched in the soil below it. Once more the rats have been trying their teeth and claws on the treasure-house ; and Reuben turns to the cart-lodge and brings out the old box-trap, a cunning home-made contrivance with a sliding door at each end, the only device which seems capable of luring an old and wary rat to his doom with consistent success. As he sets the catch and scatters a little wheat along the bottom, he muses on the warfare which he has waged all his life against his small foes, and which he will soon leave to other hands, less strenuous at the business than his. The box-trap bears on its edges a hundred or so of notches, each the epitaph of a rat ; and there is room for as many more.

As the old man passes on he pries in the hedge-bank of the farm garden till he finds a mole trap, set in a run through which the marauders invade his patch of spring cabbage. The arms of the trap are sprung wide apart, and when he pulls it up there is a stiff little black body between the jaws. It is too late in the season for mole-skins, so the corpse is jerked on to the mixen and the trap carefully set in the run. In the garden the gooseberry bushes are tagged with bits of coloured cloth, a poor device to scare the tits and finches from the buds ; the hazel " benders " of a couple of rabbit snares show where trespassers come in from the plantation to devour the

greenstuff. Old Reuben, like most of his race and time, is an inarticulate philosopher ; and as his years begin to lie a little heavily on him, he meditates on the ceaseless struggle with the wild things whose purposes have crossed his own ever since he began his life's work on the farm at seven years old. It was once a battle not without zest, a business with something of the ardour of the chase in it.

But by the time a man is 70, the game begins to wear another face. It dawns upon Reuben that the most skilful trapper is really on the losing side ; his tale of moleskins drying in the sun on the barn-door, the notches on the rat-trap, the heads counted out before the sparrow club and immortalized in a paragraph in the local paper, go for nothing in the long run against the inexhaustible reserve of the hostile battalions, always new, always advancing along the old routes and using the old crafts of instinct, choosing the same hedge-gap in 50 years, the same run beside the gatepost, the same edge of the sill at the granary doors. For a few more years he will carry on the feud against increasing odds—increasing because in the decay of good farming and the shortening of hours and zeal the old discipline of the fight is forgotten. There are neither rat-catchers nor mole-catchers now to make their customary rounds of the farms ; there is hardly a terrier to be seen at a threshing to-day. Then he will go, and the rabbits will drum on his mound in the churchyard and the moles will drive their runs through it, triumphant over their ancient foe.

It is a curious reflection that with the steady urbanization of the country and the decay of agriculture there should be an unquestionable increase in the armies of the destructive wild things. The rat plague defies all the energies directed against it ; in parts of Southern England foxes are far too numerous for the hunts to cope with them. The eruptions of mole-hills disfiguring countless meadows at the present time imply an amount of damage which seems to overwhelm the farmer's attempt to deal with them ; in gardens the mole's workings, the upheaval of seed beds and the throwing out of subsoil upon the surface, are one

of the gardener's most vexatious trials. In gardens, too, the destruction of fruit buds and fruit, of seed beds and young seedlings by birds, the need to fence the crops against rabbits with wire-netting, are a heavy addition to the bill of costs. The farmer's foes are always in full force ; but the gardener has one alleviation in the strange fluctuations of the energies of his adversaries. In some seasons, for no perceptible reason, the tits and finches will with one consent spare his buds ; a plague of voles or field mice in one year will be balanced by a practical disappearance in the next. But, in spite of temporary checks and all the aids which science affords, the weight of the depredations of the wild things steadily grows against him.

A FLEET CUTTER

She lay alongside her sister ships in the dock at Hull. Trawlers from Iceland, from Faroes, from Murmansk coast, locking in on the tide, edged to the wall of the fish market, their sides grimed and stained, their salt-encrusted funnels spurting white plummets of steam, the eroding scars of great waters lying open upon them. The morning was bleak and raw.

It was time to go. The cutter was inshore ship of the clustered group of trawlers. They were all preparing for sea. Their high, bluff bows, surmounted by whale decks, fell into a long, curving sheer offset by the sweeping rake of masts, of black funnels with coloured flags painted upon them. They were loaded deep with provisions, ice, and coal—but not too deep. They would be wet for the first few days in heavy weather—but not too wet. They combined beauty and utility, strength and seaworthiness; they were the symbols of unity of purpose and singleness of belief. An eruption of smoke, spreading over the sturdy hulls, hovered dark and ominous like a pall.

The skipper of the cutter stepped aboard. Warps were cast off. We steamed through the lock gates and vanished into the cavernous gloom. Immingham, Grimsby, Spurn Head dropped astern, fading as if obliterated by an invisible might. As we cleared the estuary our bows rose to a long ground swell, steadied in their upflung swing, dipped leisurely in greeting. Somewhere far ahead, in the encircling wastes of a mist-shrouded sea, lay the fleet of thirty odd ships we were eventually to join.

Night fell. We took our departure from the winking eye of Outer Dowsing, and set a course. The wind was East, tainted with duplicity. Its chill cut like a whetted knife, and the song of its passage droned, vibrant, in the shrouds. It rose an octave in the middle watch, singing a wild dirge as if exultant. Our motion increased, became more lively and less certain. The ship was not sure of herself. She filled her scuppers, lifted abruptly to the send of a white-topped wave, reeled, pounded down, smothering the wheelhouse in sheets of spray.

A hard dawn, filled with scudding wrack, unveiled for a few moments an angry sun that glared malevolently like the eye of an autocrat; and the lustreless expanse of foam-swept waters, reflecting the play of light and shadow, turned to a glittering plain of emerald and opal. Then successive banks of cloud, sweeping up the eastern board, spread to the zenith—massing, convoluted, like phantom legions.

But the skipper was not perturbed. He glanced at sea and sky, stopped the ship, and took a cast of the lead. We felt our way along the outer edge of the Dogger, steamed east to Cleaver Bank, and spent two days fishing. Eight times we shot and hauled. Eight times the North Sea denied us our rightful due. The skipper shook his head. Easterly weather was doing this. If we were having no luck, perhaps the fleet were faring better. They were not out six weeks at a time for nothing. Fishing was of secondary importance to us. Our job lay in transferring the catch to market.

We sighted them the next morning. They appeared diminutive, minute—black specks dotted against the monochrome of the sky. We closed them steadily. A lane of masts and funnels gyrated extravagantly, and the deep red paint of underwater bodies gleamed like spilled blood.

The admiral, his insignia of rank at fore masthead, ordered the fleet to board. We lay with stopped engines. Ship after ship, steaming past to windward, dropped her boat, then circled to leeward to await its return. The waters became alive with hurrying craft. They dis-

appeared from view in deep valleys ; they rose on the crests of seas ; they careered down steep declivities ; they swooped and soared, as lively and buoyant as restive seabirds. Along the lee side they jostled and crowded, smashing, crunching, grinding against our lurching hull to the rasp of torn and splintered wood. The decks became crowded with oil-skinned, sea-booted men. They flung empty boxes, sacks of vegetables, and sides of beef into the boats with ringing shouts and resounding laughter. They joked, they sang ; lusty oaths and rollicking greetings rose in a deep-voiced clamour.

All day we trawled with the fleet. The catch was good. At night the admiral, shattering the darkness with rockets and flares, revealed his movements ; and the fleet manoeuvred, obedient to his will. The tossing lines of working lights, circling the horizon, shone clear and confident like new-born constellations.

In the morning we loaded 700 boxes of fish. They were iced and stowed. The skipper, hand on telegraph, watched the last boat leave. He rang down for full speed. Shipwash was dropped astern the next forenoon, and we steamed up London River—a full flood under our keel. Ahead lay “ a mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping ”—outflung fortifications of the heart of Empire. But our destination was the market that is Billingsgate.

STRAWBERRY DOWN

We always called it Strawberry Down, because in summer its southern slopes were covered with little wild strawberry plants, which bore abundant fruit. There we loved to drowse and pluck and eat, and drowse again and watch the martins circling overhead, and lazily follow the vagaries of blue butterflies as they danced gavottes and minuets over the flower-decked turf. It was a perfect place in which to dream away a summer's day.

The Down's chief glory lies in its wealth of orchids. But to reach it and them we must go along one of our winding lanes, past fields already green with growing corn, and between hedgerows starred with stitchwort and blue with the little eyes of the creeping speedwell. Here the whitethroat is nesting, and the hedge-sparrow can be seen flitting from bush to bush in search of food for her young. A goldfinch flashes past and the cuckoo calls from the wood. Now we begin to mount, gradually at first, then, as the ascent becomes steeper, shortening our steps until quite suddenly we find ourselves standing on the most beautiful Down in the world. It stretches away from our feet until in the near distance it loses itself in a small wood. On the north side, running the entire length, is what in these parts is called a shave (a narrow strip of trees and undergrowth), while to the south the Down slopes rather abruptly to a sunken cart track, where in autumn the largest of blackberries grow, and in spring the blackcap nests. But to-day our expectation is of quite other things. Expectation? Rather, certainty, for this spot has never failed yet; and there, indeed, growing almost in our path,

is a clump of the Musk Orchid, difficult to see against the turf, but nevertheless there, with its hundred spikes of tiny yellow flowers.

Let us go down on our knees to it, not so much in reverence as to gather the fragrance, and be reminded of the delicious, mysterious, musky smell of old cupboards and presses, wondrous places that contained all sorts of delights, joys that only saw daylight on very special occasions, unless they were brought out to relieve the monotony of a wet afternoon. A few yards to the right, where the turf grows longer, is the Butterfly Orchid, looking as if it had fluttered here from some tropical land, so waxen and sweet are the flowers. Nearby are plants of *Orchis maculata*, not yet in bloom, but full of bud. Again we go forward and round a bend in the path come on a regiment of little green men, which seem to have sprung up from nowhere. These are the Man Orchis, a rarity elsewhere, but here abundant. They can be seen on all sides like sentries standing guard over the treasures hidden in the wood beyond.

Turning towards the shave and coming where low-growing shrubs meet the Down, we see a colony of the Fly Orchid hiding a little shyly in the grass, its curious, graceful, velvety flowers, which are so like a fly that one may easily be deceived. A moment more and the shave presents the Lady herself; that is the name I prefer for her, though, like all Royal persons, she has several—the Brown Winged, the Great Dark Winged, and, prosaically, *Orchis purpurea*. Here she grows, tall and lovely, protected and shaded by stately beeches, surrounded by her court of lesser orchids, far from the haunts of man and the greedy hands of the plant hunter.

If we push on a few steps we shall find the large flowers and cool green foliage of the White Helleborine; and if we search under the beech trees we are sure of the brown flowers of the Bird's Nest Orchid, a strange leafless thing with a charm all its own. This little path leading out to the north side of the shave is at once our triumph and our tragedy. For almost where we stand once grew the Lizard



ST. CATHERINE'S HILL, WINCHESTER

Orchid. One summer only did he put forth his single spike of flowers with their long ragged twisted tongues and their unpleasant smell, mysterious, Medusa-like, repellent. He grew like a solitary monarch until democracy in the shape of a dairymaid seized on him, rooted him up and carried him off, leaving only a memory.

Going home by the lower path along the Down we shall come on an early Spider and see some buds on the Bee Orchid, to many the most fascinating of all ; we shall pass through drifts of Fragrant Orchid, and here and there the conical head of the Pyramid will bejewel the turf. Then, the day's search over and our faces towards the setting sun, the voice of the nightingale will come floating on the evening air, calling up visions of such loveliness that, for a moment, we shall stand on the threshold of a world of dim dreams.

Should you revisit the Down late in August you will find it studded with the little white flowers of the Ladies' Tresses, that have borrowed their scent straight from the lily-of-the-valley. In the shave you will see the broad-leaved Helleborine, and, if very fortunate or possessed of the unerring instinct of genius, you will come on a solitary patch of the rare violet *Epipactis*. But I shall never tell you where to look.

SUMMER

THE DAWN CHORUS

May is the month in which birds attain to their full powers of song, yet, with what appears to be a deliberate slight on man, they exhibit them perfectly at an hour when he is either wrapt in sleep or suffering in a vain pursuit of it. During this month, however, anyone who is ready to face the prospect of waking with a violent start at the ringing of an alarm clock set for 3.45 a.m., and of leaving his warm bed to venture out into the cold, grey morning, will be amply repaid for his hardihood by the rare pleasure of listening to the wonderful chorus which the birds provide.

There is, in the very early morning before dawn, a feeling of intent watchfulness and suspended activity, like that of an animal about to spring ; the passive surrender of night is gone, and everything waits in silent preparation for the day. This brooding silence is suddenly broken by the crowing of a cock, the signal for the departure of the spirits of darkness ; it is also the herald of the kingdom of day. Its crowing will remain unchallenged perhaps for a quarter of an hour, except for the occasional screech of a little owl and the distant, drowsy rasp of a corncrake, which sounds as if it were drawing its claws over the teeth of a comb. Then, without a murmur of warning, a spirit seems to move through the garden and before the listener is properly aware the first notes of the chorus have stolen out into the grey, meditative silence. They are sung by thrushes in the blossom-laden apple-trees, drowsily at first, but gathering in number and volume as the minutes advance. Through them, like drops of molten gold, flow the glorious,

mellow phrases of blackbirds, announcing, as it were, the themes of the symphony, until every bush and tree seems to sway in the flood of song and quiver with tremulous rapture.

Soon the tits throw in their curious miscellany of notes—a teasing, chattering, tinkling jargon. The cheerful, reiterated cries of the exploring nuthatch penetrate the throng, augmented now by the husky utterance of the greenfinch and the louder and more sustained songs of robins and hedgesparrows. A brilliant outburst of melody from a wren, like the light of an explosion, brings about a thrilling climax ; it gives the lead to the chaffinches, whose joyous treble makes the listener aware of bursting lilacs and drooping yellow laburnums. A cuckoo utters its two clarinet notes, and jackdaws and rooks call out in tones which are incapable of musical representation. So intricate is the maze of sound that it seems impossible it will ever be unravelled, until a woodpecker suddenly tears through it with a peal of derisive laughter.

Despite this ribaldry, the woodpigeons, when the chorus is at its highest, begin making their everlasting pleas, imploring their mates with desperate earnestness to take those two somethings which are never accepted and whose identity will never be ascertained : their passionate cooing fills the whole garden with a drowsy love-sickness which muffles the sharper sounds of the other birds. The chorus begins to dwindle and subside, the different notes going out like candles in the wind, until in scarcely more than an hour from the time when it began there is nothing left of its former grandeur but the desultory singing of a few persistent soloists. These are mostly thrushes, unwilling, perhaps, that the only relics of the glorious symphony just ended should be the ridiculous chatter of sparrows and starlings, pottering about their household duties like garrulous charwomen.

About half an hour still remains before sunrise : a time of expectancy still, yet also of reminiscence, for a marvellous thing has been created and vanished away ; the garden is cold and grey still, but a pool of green seems to have welled

up into it and to hold in its depths trees, bushes, grass, and flowers like shimmering reflections of themselves. As the minutes slip by and the melodies fade away the listener is forced, even against his will, to admire and wonder at the birds' tribute to the miracle of Creation, and to ponder upon the inability of man, with all his complexity of soul and intellect, to achieve with such ease such moments of gratitude and ecstasy. On some mysterious impulse which drives them all, these small feathered creatures awake, and before eating a morsel of food or following any other pursuit throw their whole vitality and being into the energy of song. In its spontaneous and united expression of joy and happiness the Dawn Chorus is a true thanksgiving for existence, a triumphant vindication of the fundamental beauty of life.

THE MAYFLY RISES

The very air is tremulous with big dancing flies, which invade wayside stations and passing trains. Nearly all the birds are in excited pursuit, from the big white ducks to the inadequate chaffinches, which hardly know what to do with such mouthfuls. The moorhens are, perhaps, the busiest, and from their vantage points behind the sedges or projecting roots they make constant forays as the flies sail down, often to distant view simulating the commotion of a great determined fish. It is a moot point whether the moorhen or the swift provokes the angler to worse language on those days when fly is somewhat sparse. Either bird will effectually prevent any from reaching that particular spot on which his eyes are fixed so eagerly. But when the hatch is really on the birds do not matter. There is more provender than they and all the fish in the river, striving as one appetite, can possibly consume. Sometimes one sees Mayflies in thousands floating along without attracting the least notice. That means that for the moment all fly-eaters are replete.

I wonder sometimes whether the "perfect" day of warm, bright hours and abundant fly is the best for fishing. It is glorious indeed, but the trout soon stay their first appetites, largely on nymphs, and then they become inclined to pick and choose. Even small patterns of artificial Mayfly and fine gut may not avail to deceive them. It sometimes pays then, by the way, to offer a lazily feeding fish something quite different; such as a Welshman's button, a red sedge, or a large pink Wickham. It also pays to try "minor tactics" on a fish which is evidently

feeding occasionally, but allows many flies to drift over it untaken. A small hackle Mayfly may be successful if it comes down to such a fish under water. Or some other pattern may serve. Here is an experience to prove it.

It was on my third day of waiting. I stood melancholy in a withy bed, in which most of the withies had been cut back, but one 6ft. shoot had been allowed to grow here and there just where it would most interfere with the back-cast. The wind raged from the south-west—that is to say, straight over my right shoulder and aslant downstream. It rained. But a nice little hatch of fly was in progress and I remained, sodden yet resolved, for somewhere within casting distance of me was a mighty trout, known to me these last two seasons. And I suspected the presence of one or two more. Sure enough, after a bit the tail of my eye caught sight of an extra turmoil in a ripple under the far bank, about 20 yards lower down. I moved to within casting distance of the spot, and presently saw a big head and a shoulder show for an instant. A trout at last! I will not dwell on the difficulty of covering the fish from among the withies in that horrible wind with a back-handed cast and a lot of slack line to defeat the drag. Suffice it to say that when the hackle Mayfly did at last get to the right place, there followed a surging rise, a bit of wild work with the rod, and a fish pricked and suspicious. After that there was a period of frantic casting with several different patterns of Mayfly—the wind allowed about one cast in six to place the fly somewhere near the ripple—and the result was four other short rises. But at last the trout would have nothing more to do with any artificial fly, and it seemed that the game was over. Yet, even as I formed this sad conclusion, the head and shoulder appeared once more and provoked a final effort. In my box were one or two big March browns with yellow bodies—designed for lake trout—and in desperation I put one on, soaked it, and hurled it across as a wet fly. The fish simply flung itself upon this unorthodox pattern, and for a few thrilling seconds I was attached to something heavy. Then, alas, my March brown came back to me, and the game really was over.

In old days men used to catch plenty of big trout with sunk Mayflies, and it is obvious that the same thing could be done to-day. But it is not, of course, the real sport, and is only suggested as a help in time of trouble, when obstinate fish or fierce weather make dry-fly work of little avail. The real sport is when you find your fish feeding steadily under your own bank, when easy airs allow the fly to drop softly 18 in. above him (with a nice outward curve in the gut cast), and when, like the masters, you count two before you raise the rod in response to the expected rise. There are days on which these things happen, and all is calmly triumphant, but, in my experience, they do not come every season. Perhaps, after all, we should not enjoy the sport so much if they did. My lost four-pounder, for instance—if I had caught him with that March brown, caught he would have been.

The Drake's Progress—I realize that I have said little or nothing about it. Briefly it is this :—(1) The period of nymphs, when trout chiefly feed under water as the insects make their way from ooze to air. Use a hackle pattern (called "straddlebug") for preference, as it represents a nymph in the act of metamorphosis. (2) The Mayfly time, when trout feed on the subimago, or first stage of the winged fly. Go on with your hackle pattern (it is much less expensive, both for purse and temper), but have some winged flies in reserve. There are fish which take them decidedly better. (3) The after-time of spent gnats. This is when the imago or perfect fly falls on the water, the business of reproduction finished. Use one of the several excellent imitations that are common, and for preference use rather a small one. (4) The sedge hour. May is a little early for this, but by June you may find big trout rising greedily after the Mayfly is apparently over for the day, and when the light is growing dim. If so, the chances are that the great red sedge is the reason for it. I cannot vouch for it from my own records, but I believe this fly might, if studied, account for the biggest trout of every Mayfly season. May some student have luck and prove it!



THE SEVEN SISTERS

ON DARTMOOR

Dartmoor hardly seems to belong to our world of to-day. Civilized man has carried his cultivation up the valleys and even subdued corners of the moor to his own uses. But Dartmoor still defies him. Even the grouse does not make his home there for him to preserve, as on the moors of Scotland or Yorkshire. The lonely homesteads, built of primeval Dartmoor granite, that appear upon it here and there, are the measure of his failure. The newcomer who takes up his abode at one of the moor centres in order to be able to escape into the typical Devon country that surrounds it, should the moor pall upon him, soon finds himself drawn to it by an irresistible attraction that will make him consider each day as wasted that he spends away from it. The varying shades of brown and green when the bracken is reawakening to life in the late spring, or the brilliant purple and gold of the heather and broom on a bright day of brilliant sunshine in summer, or the clouds and mist racing and playing from ridge to ridge when rain is threatening, will fill him with a new elation each time he sees them.

The very loneliness of the moor makes it companionable. The dwellers on it seem cheerful and sociable enough, but there are moments when one almost craves for solitude. A party naturally sociable, starting out on a day's trip, will keep cheerfully together for a while, but once the last of the stone walls that are the bulwarks of civilization have been left behind, it displays an irresistible tendency to disintegrate into its component units. The Roman Campagna produces something of the same effect, but

the Campagna is more gentle. There is a wistfulness about its desolation. It is not triumphant. It has not successfully kept man at a distance, like Dartmoor.

On Dartmoor we are in the presence of the primeval. Gradually we come to realize that the only men who have really possessed the moor, who have made it their own by choice because it corresponded with their own way of life, are the builders of the circles and pounds that lie scattered over it in such numbers. And theirs it is still. The ponies and even the sheep and cattle soon acquire a hardy roughness that seems to bring them back into the world of these primeval men. The peat that lies drying in the sun is their peat, and the men who are cutting it over there are doing their work. The clapper bridges that span the rapid, purling moor brooks are relics of older days. We use them, but they are not our bridges.

As we lie buried deep in heather looking out over the brown, boggy patches that stretch away across the valley to the tors beyond, at the meeting-place of a couple of Dartmoor streams with the great granite stones piled confusedly around us, even the strange cry of the lapwing does not altogether control the weird feeling that we have somehow slipped back a couple of thousand years. The very farmer silhouetted against the setting sun as he crosses the ford down stream on his shaggy pony does not clash with the illusion. Yes, the old world still lives for us here on Dartmoor—the walls of the pounds, the stone huts, the long avenues of stones, and the clapper bridges—and we can enter into their life to-day. Only the circles seem altogether dead to us. The belief that inspired the building of them is something we cannot hope to recapture.

A CLIMBER'S REWARD

A trip to the Highlands begets the one insistent thought that the dweller in the town can never complete the existence for which he was designed. The better part of his mental life is inhibited. His horizon—if he can really be said to have a horizon—is brickbound.

The mind needs for its development more than information ; it demands for the emotions that sweep of vision which only limitless hills or the ocean can provide. Mountain dwellers and sailors know that, or rather feel it, often without the consciousness of the why or the wherefore. They differ from others in hopefulness, in association, in religion, or, it may be, in superstition. Indeed, religion itself is sometimes crippled in places where the mind has no scope to climb—no room to move towards greater things.

The Highlands resemble the seas. They are an eternal lesson in the Infinite. They remind man of his inability to conceive either a beginning or an end. Yet they prepare him for an evolution of the spirit. It is a paradox how stupendous masses of matter can suggest the intangible and the spiritual. Bishop Butler might have strengthened his " Analogy " by a visit to these hills. In them may, perhaps, be found also an explanation of the Scotsman's love of metaphysics—the desire to search into the essence of magnitudes which confound mere intellect.

If it be the function of the senses to feed the mind, what food is here ! He who ascends a mountain delights—if he has a soul—in the journey at every stage, not because he is striving to achieve something which no other has achieved, but because through his vision fancy is fed upon

the richest viands. It is true that he breasts and forces his physical way through Nature's fastnesses and penetrates into Nature's secret places, but better still and more exhilarating is the spiritual feast which the eye provides, and in the end the rapture of contemplation when vision is constrained to abandon its work to imagination.

It is at this moment that the climber slowly ascends the hill again in thought and sees the various phases of his journey, as one who recalls a summer garden years after he has seen it. At the foot—how long ago!—there were rushing streams and laughing burns, with forests of bracken and wych elms nodding above the pools where little trout were busy drowning the morning gnats. A few yards more and the ferns meet the heather, with here and there a bluebell. Higher the filmy larches waved their wands to summon waters battling from the rocks.

Higher still the firs were sougling in harmony with cascades—somnolent music which tempted to rest and dreaminess. Another stage, and then a patch or two of farewell heather led to a Cubist carpet of green and brown mosses and lichen white and grey and orange, eking out their Lenten life among the boulders. Here many a seedling fir or birch had perished in its ambition to prick the clouds, and it remained a withered warning against the sin by which the angels fell.

Now is the land—if one may call it land which lies so high—of crags and cliffs and avalanches of shards and shale and the primeval quartz and giant rocks, hurled by thunders and by storms and torrents from brow to brow as though upon the peaks some demon dwelt who wrought all through the ages against the advances of the beauty which lies below in sunlight.

This is a dizzy height, but even here the light will glimmer on the facets of a cliff or paint the waterfalls beneath in white. Up here there is silence.

The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration.

Yet it is difficult to believe it, for one's spirits seem to shout for joy. The eye is permitted for seconds only

to peep through the mists and hazes at lochs like cups of quicksilver and streams coiled as dark-blue snakes. Here is the enchantment of distance. That which was an expanse of pink heather, sombre firs, and yellow larches and berry-laden rowans, on this mountain is a rolling cloak of olive and purple upon the shoulders of its neighbour. Farther away yet is a cone of azure with a streak of gold, and just behind it a spear of black transfixing an angry rain-cloud. Beyond there is no distinguishing between hill and sky. Earth has reached heaven at last by pleasant ways—by river and glen with mountain flowers, and lichened crags, and precipices diamond-set. Is not that what man, the climber, seeks to do ! Thus does one come to wonder, if on this side of that meeting of the two there be such glory, what there would be for an ethereal voyager whose lot it was to travel downwards with the clouds. At that trysting place of land and sky behind the veil of distance there is naught but subtle colourings :—

For ever changing like the joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy.

This is a picture of distance, and distance is the revelation of Nature's soul. That is why there is magic and second sight in the Highlands.

ON THE CAIRNGORMS

To the high tops of the Cairngorms spring has never found her way this season. Up to the end of the third week in May all the hill-tops and high-lying corries were spotlessly white, and almost daily fresh snow fell. Then, as though by magic, a day of great heat came, followed by other days of like warmth and sunshine. Full summer took the place of winter, and the birds of the high tops revelled in its breath and in the joy of living. But after a morning of oppressive heat, distant rumblings were borne in the still air across from Coire an Lochan of Cairngorm, and a mass of snow detached itself from the steep, rocky face of the corrie, and blocks of frozen snow and ice bounded down the hill to the little lochan which lies in the heart of the corrie.

The burn that drains the corrie ran fast and full of clear snow water from the high hills. In the corrie, but for the murmur of water and the occasional croak of a ptarmigan, was a great silence. The lochan was still partly imprisoned by the ice, and on the deep, clear waters small icebergs floated. Around lay the remains of more than one avalanche, and more falls of snow and ice seemed imminent as above the snowflecked precipices the dark form of an eagle appeared and shot against the breeze at express speed. Then, circling round, and rising with scarce a movement of his wings to a great height, he dropped vertically, falling in a steep "nosedive" with wings almost closed. Checking himself after a few seconds, he once more rose, until he was half lost in the clouds, after which display of unexcelled power of flight he alighted on a pinnacle, his

outline clear against the sky and even his dark plumage distinct.

Another day, as over the higher grounds a strong southerly wind swept the hills, many ptarmigan could be seen. Those breeding at the lowest elevation, some 2,500ft., had already begun to brood, but above 3,000ft., where the ground had been only recently freed of snow, and on all the highest ground they will not nest much before the middle of June.

From the summit of Cairngorm, 4,084ft. above the level of the sea, the view this summer's day was almost incredibly Arctic. From here to where the great bulk of Ben Muich Dhui rises to a height of 4,300ft., about five miles distant, stretches a wide plateau, in parts exceeding, and everywhere approaching, the 4,000ft. level. Despite the warmth of the southerly wind, even at this height, the plateau lay almost entirely buried in great fields of snow, on which the sun shone with dazzling brilliance. In full summer many hill burns have their birth on this plateau, and flow, sparkling in the sunlight, to the depths of Loch Avon, in the very heart of the high hills. But to-day their course was beneath the snow beds, and only for short intervals did their waters appear, before being once again swallowed up by these dark snow tunnels. No plant life stirred; but before June is out many flowers will blossom here—the delicate mountain azalea (*azalea procumbens*), the cushion pink (*silene acaulis*), and others. Here cushion-like will spread the bright green leaves of *salix herbacea*, and from the boggy ground buttercups and marsh marigolds will tinge the plateau with their brightly-coloured blossoms. As yet they were lifeless beneath the snows of a long winter.

The ptarmigan of the high tops have now as their companion the charming and confiding dotterel, fresh from its wintering in southern lands. Persecution has driven this small wader to the wildest and least accessible hill country; though even here the egg collector finds it an easy victim. But ptarmigan, because their eggs do not command so high a price, are not uncommon

about the high tops. Here, summer and winter, they remain. See how a pair—rivals for the affections of a hen bird that stands quietly by—pursue each other backwards and forwards across the snow-studded expanse. Now they alight for a moment or two on the snow, exhausted for the time being, now run quickly parallel to each other across the snow with wings outspread to balance themselves better. The flight of the ptarmigan is more rapid and powerful than that of the grouse, and as they speed down a snow-covered slope with wings almost touching the surface, or climb, with scarcely a check to their speed, the steep and rocky hillside, this strength of wing is shown to the full.

One hill loch was still entirely frozen across—namely, Lochan Uaine of Cairntoul. Over its surface great cracks spread and intersected, but the ice, which has now covered the loch since October, is many feet thick. In this land the Dee has its birth these early summer days. But now the waters of the hill lochs will soon be freed and only in the deep corries sheltered from the sun will the snows of winter linger till past midsummer.

THE ENGLISH SEAS

Of the varied hues of the sea, some are native to itself, and others the reflection of the many moods of the sky. The true colour of absolutely pure sea water appears to be blue, like the colour of the other deep above us ; but even a minute organic admixture is enough to give it that tinge of green which in varying degrees is most characteristic of it. The sea-green tint of the sea is mainly due to the decay of its own gardens and forests—the beds of laver and wrack and tangle which flourish from the upper tide-mark to the depths where daylight fails. Sea-weeds are as often red or olive as green ; for green vegetation, below the water as above it, only flourishes in ample light. But all these weeds, when dissolved, help to paint the waves sea-green.

Much of the colour of the sea off shallow coasts comes also from an admixture of silt and sand ; for sand, although itself almost insoluble, colours the breaking waves by its fine grains tossing in suspension. Where a chalk cliff fronts the sea, we can often watch, when the tide is low, a milk-like stream pouring out from its foot in the current ; and this effluent is finer than sand, and floats more buoyantly. All round the south and east coasts of England, where the rocks are newer and softer, the daily waste of the shore line helps to colour the milky seas. These turbid waters are characteristic of the narrower and shallower seas ; they are as natural, and almost as lovely, as the brighter colours of the west. Shoals and sands cast up their drift in mid-channel before every gale ; we only see clear water in calm weather ; every wave has a cloudy mane. These flatter

coasts are also most productive of the sea's green dye ; for in low bays and creeks the growth of submarine vegetation is very abundant, while every storm can tear it from its shallow hold. The green North Sea water is a denser medium than the tinted seas of Devon. It harmonizes in fair weather with the flat green shores of either coast, that sink to it so easily ; and in storm, when the waves are thick with sand, they plunge among the wind-plucked dunes with a muffled confusion unlike the shock of pure water on hard rock.

On certain stretches of the west coast, tide and wind pour sand out of the depths of the sea in inexhaustible volume, but most of our western shores are rocky and steep. There is little silt in suspension, except when some landslip has lately shed ruin down an ancient cliff. Belts of sand on these rockier coasts are often mere ledges or ribbons, covering not half of the tide's daily range. To bathe on these strands needs accurate time-keeping ; an hour too soon or too late, and we may find them fathom-deep, or high and dry. As a rule, the cliffs drop nearly as steeply under water as above it ; and the sea-growths plunge so steeply with them that they soon pass out of reach of surface storms. Local gales may cause great splashing, but they do not rake the slopes at which the deeper seaweeds dwell. These can only be ravaged by a ground-swell—that powerful throbbing when vast fields of ocean have been set in motion by distant winds. Then the sea-forests are uprooted, as by the punctual blasts of some unearthly gale. Enormous quantities of weed are cast up in all creeks and bays after such a tremor ; and in bathing coves the water may be not only tinged deep green, as when lowland rivers “ fine down ” after heavy rain at the fall of the leaf, but thick with dissolving fragments.

Seen from the cliff-top in fine weather in later summer, the western sea has contrasts of colour unknown on sandier shores. “ The water's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale to the leeward ”—but the image is too sallow and pallid to fit these seas. The stripes are like the necks of peacocks—peacock green, the green of the Burmese

peacock, interlacing with peacock blue. These contrasts are partly due to the violent conflict of currents off the Atlantic shores ; they have hardly time to accomplish their errands among the reefs and crags before the next tide spins them back again. Rocks below the surface score the green and purple fields with long white streamers—a more translucent whiteness than pours from the chalk cliffs down eastern seas. Here and there the glassy surface is clouded by a flaw of wind, like breath on a mirror, or a panel of frosted silver ; and at the western limit of all this brightness the blue sea melts into the blue sky in a lilac haze.

BORDER WILDS

If natural beauty consists mainly in blue mountains, sylvan walks, and gliding streams, then few parts of the country are so destitute of it as the Cheviot Hills. At Hethpool on College Water, at Davidson's Lynn on Usway, at Belford on Bowmont, there are certainly a few "pretty bits," which an artist of the older school might find delight in copying. But these, at best but few, are the merest details in a landscape whose free and flowing lines rebel against the laws of composition. Sea birds cannot be tamed, nor are the Cheviots paintable. At least they are not grand or rich in colour, as Scotch Highland scenery is, nor does their formation admit of the jagged outlines and accidental symmetries which painters love. Nay, conventionally considered, there are few uglier spots outside the four-mile circle than that which surrounds the beacon on High Cheviot; a waste of rudely-broken peaty soil, raggedly clothed with a poor growth of bents, and canna-tufts, and cloudberry leaves. Not always, of course, but, as long familiarity calculates, on an average of 300 days out of 365, a blustering wind whistles through this primitive herbage, while, oftener than not, a ring of low-hung raincloud closes the horizon. Though not to the eye, this rugged tableland makes its appeal to the imagination.

The shepherds' love of Cheviot proclaims itself not in such words as "lovely," "grand," "magnificent," or others better chosen, but in desire to revisit the district when their fate has carried them away from it. One there was who showed his affinity for these solitudes in even

stronger though not less silent wise. He was a drystone dyker by trade, and had built himself a rude hut in the ruined wood at Trowburn, where he abode for long, doing all his own house-work, which seemed chiefly to consist of baking oaten cakes on a flat stone. Asked once if he was not sometimes eerie in his solitude, "I fear but One," he said, "and He is my protector." This man had little education, but such as he had had helped him to an antithesis which Victor Hugo need not have disdained.

For those who can rise to it, his is doubtless the ideal temper in which to visit Cheviot-head. Others, of somewhat different constitution, may amuse themselves in finding, in the repeated single note of some late-nesting golden plover, a perfect musical expression of the spirit of the place. Then there is generally a fox's earth in one of the innumerable perpendicular faces of the peat-hag, so that you may have the good fortune to catch sight of the vixen and her brood at play before the entrance. It is a pretty sight, a bit of savage domesticity. But, alas ! in a pastoral district, foxes have, of course, to be kept down ; and such units of the litter as may escape the Border hounds will doubtless fall a prey to sheepdogs, when the local shepherds, anticipating the lambing season, hold their annual hunt on New Year's Day.

Cheviot Beacon, or as much of it as is left, stands on English soil, the border line being determined by the watershed, and remaining to this day pretty much what it was in the year 1222, when an attempt to settle it was made by Commissioners, acting for Henry the Third on the one hand and Alexander the Second on the other. Defoe came hither when collecting materials for his *Descriptive Tour of England*, riding up, as he managed to persuade himself, at the imminent peril of his life. And Scott must have been here too ; for, few as they are, the lines of his metrical fragment on Cheviot are unmistakably drawn from the life. They probably made the ascent from the English side, but, in descending, the Scottish side is to be preferred. Springs, pools, and streams, superficial and subterranean, change their sites and courses easily in this

loose porous soil, and if anyone happens to be overtaken here by mist or darkness, he will do well to keep a sharp look out for waterholes, which sometimes descend to a great depth.

It is only on approaching the edges of the plateau that the almost limitless views—looking southward into Yorkshire, eastward over the North Sea, and northward to the Lammermuirs and Eildons—are properly opened up. And you may plod a couple of miles over hill-top moorland before the rushing Mereburn, sunken in its fern-edged course, begins to serve you as a guide in your descent. “Mere” is the old English word for a boundary. Next you will pass some very rugged architecture—a natural rocky crest being slightly modified by cairns built by the shepherds at odd moments from the adjacent débris. And so to the dark glen and waterfall of Hell Hole—the most striking natural feature in the whole Cheviot range—where until very recently a pair of ravens yearly bred among the porphyry pinnacles and columns of the gorge.

MARKET-THURSDAY

On Thursdays the roads leading into the town soon grow lively with vehicles, folk, and beasts on their way to market. Clouds and trails of dust rise above the road, and stockmen's and drovers' cries float across the fields. The beasts are on the road first ; cows with calves, heifers, and bullocks, and detachments of downland sheep. Pigs, poultry, and parentless calves travel by gig or float, covered over by a rope net or in crates. After them—in regular sequence—come the country-folk, driving—four or five, usually three women and a man—pressed together and shaking and rattling ; then the carriers ; and, lastly, prosperous farmers in motor-cars, cloth caps, light-coloured dust-coats, and gaiters.

About two o'clock business begins. The sun beats down upon the shadeless market-square, and the shops along one side with their awnings of varied size and colour wink across at the dull red Georgian residences on the other. Standing by itself, more Georgian than the most Georgian "residence," is a renowned hostelry, tinted now a pale yellow, where a famous portrait painter first saw the light ; it bears the effigy of an amiable-looking bear above its portico. A clock from the church tower, which bears upon its flanks marks of the cannon balls of Oliver Cromwell, strikes the quarters in a mellow tone scarcely heard above the cries of the market-place. Beyond the grey and red roof-tops is a glimpse of the swelling green outline of the downs.

The market revolves around a plain stone monument put up "to transmit to future times the record of an awful

event." A woman having bought with three other women a sack of wheat, swore that she had paid her share of the same, calling upon God to witness that she spoke the truth; whereon she fell dead, the money being found clasped in her hand. How many of those who, week in, week out, lounge here on Market-Thursday have so much as read the long and formal inscription? The lowing of cows and calves, grunting of pigs, shrieks and protests of fowls, loud quacking of ducks surround the base of the monument on two sides, while from a third comes another quacking, that of cheap jewelry and patent-medicine vendors. "And bring it back, gentlemen—bring it back if you're not satisfied!" cries the smart little fellow in the elastic-sided patent-leather boots and the black tie with the pearl pin. "I want you all to go away feeling you've got yer money's worth. Here, little Jimmy, you've bought a watch, ain't yer? Now then, wouldn't yer like a chain? Yes or no? Yes. Very well, here's a gold one—real gold. Take it! I don't want nothing. It's a gift. I only want you to go away satisfied, gentlemen."

Queer people stand round—men from the villages, men from the downs in billycock hats, respectable looking three-quarter coats, breeches and gaiters. Here and there is a patch of colour where a farmer stands, or horse-dealer, clad in the lightest possible tweeds, a grey billycock, canary waistcoat, and yellow riding boots. At the opposite extreme the drovers in rags and patched relics, shaggy-haired, and with unshaven, unwashed faces. And—goodness gracious—what faces! Faces like Mr. Punch; faces fringed with whisker like the advertisement of a well-known comedian; faces like church gargoyles, and faces like shiny knobs of sticks; old-fashioned Victorian faces, ruddy horse-like faces, and faces upon which West Country beer has set its mark.

And all the time the auctioneer, elderly, rubicund, and in pince-nez, is gabbling in a monotonous sing-song: "Four I'm bid! four I'm bid! Any advance on four?"



ON THE SLOPES OF IVINGHOE BEACON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

For the last time, gentlemen—five, five-and-a-half, six I'm bid, six—any advance on six ? ” and so on.

In the covered market, where everything is sold, from books and church texts to table centres and dead poultry, it is almost impossible to move, so many women are shopping, and there are babies and perambulators. But it is cool in here ; a delicate grey light reigns, in contrast to the yellow sunshine at either end. At the sign of the Bear the market ordinary is finished, but much promiscuous drinking is going forward.

Market-Thursday begins to fade away about 3.30. By 4 all the motor carriers and all the horse carriers are drawn up in a row beside the monument to the wicked woman, and ladders are adjusted to the roofs. What a squash there is, what a wrestling with parcels, children, perambulators, and horticultural implements ! The young folk perch on the roof like big birds, others cling on behind ; and within everybody is sitting on everybody else's lap. At the same moment the animals and the poultry take their departure amid all the raucous sounds of the farmyard. Br-r-r-r-k ! Off they go to the snug farm, to the thatched cottage, and to the wide, quiet spaces of the Great Plain.

SONG-BIRDS OF SUMMER

As verdure thickens in May, the voices of new birds multiply ; in the full flush of spring-time, every bough holds a singing bird. Like a tide racing up a sandy estuary, the waves of new life change the scene almost from moment to moment before our eyes ; a single soft morning, after the north-west wind, and the hedges will be opaque with verdure, and filled with voices that we have not heard for 10 months past. The more abundant birds of summer—willow wrens and whitethroats, most of all—spread across the country, in sudden bursts of favourable weather, in waves which fill the brakes and hedgeside bramble-patches with multitudinous song. For a day or two, or it may be only for one morning, the whitethroats which will people a wide tract to northwards, come pouring through the hedges of a single parish. Their song—half sweet, half shrewish—is so omnipresent that it seems distilled from the very hawthorn leaves, from the nettles which begin to choke the thorns ; and continually we see the lithe dusty figure slipping among the sprays, and the whitethroat bristle with restlessness, like the beard of an old anxious man. Such waves of a single species, with every bird tingling with life, and in continual song, produce an almost overwhelming impression even on ears which have listened for weeks to the bird's increasing music.

Birds arrive, as a rule, when their haunts have grown green enough to hide them. The first willow wrens, which arrived a month ago or more, found the sprays prematurely green ; but April winds gradually slowed down the year's

advance, until later comers like the garden warbler and reed warbler, and even the main body of the earlier kinds, have found their quarters very much as usual. We had just time, as we usually have, to see the first whitethroats clearly among the naked bramble-stems, before the nettles shot so high and the hedge-leaves expanded so fully, that they were swallowed up for the rest of the season. Punctually to the whitethroats' needs, the hedge-bottoms thickened ; their old nests, which all the winter stared us in the face, have disappeared exactly at the time when the new ones are being twined among the thorns and nettlestems. Behind this screen of leaves, which will vanish before the October winds like a scroll in the fire, the "nettle-creeper," as countryfolk well call the whitethroat, lives out its summer life.

It is surprising how little we should know of most birds if they were dumb. We "hear the cuckoo," though we "see the swallow." How seldom the corncrake is uncovered, from the time the rising meadow grass tops his lifted neck, until he is flushed, now and then, at partridge-shooting time ! The shivering ditty of the wood wren is often as persistent in the May beech-tops as the rustle of the breeze ; but we often have to watch long, under their green light, before he steps forth visibly in his yellowish greenness, and delights us by combining the shivering cry with his series of bell-like calls. Well might they be thought the voice of a different bird. The long sweet descant of the garden warbler seems to flow from all the leaves and flowers of the scented copse, rather than from any one bird. Often, while he is singing, the only bird visible is a chaffinch on the boughs above ; and he is still too busy with his own song to have time for that more summer-like strain. The strongest upholder of the warblers' rule not to be seen is the grasshopper warbler. He winds his endless reel among the leaves and sedges from now until almost all birds are dumb. He might have hooked the kraken in some great green pool in the water-meadows, and be reeling him in all summer ; but too few have seen him to tell.

Dreams dwell in the green and golden places where the birds sing, in the magic of the flowery day as well as in the long evenings when the fernowl hums. But sometimes the eye and ear alike are charmed by a singer which exults in the open. High above the skylarks very early in May, the sky rings to the long-drawn music of the swifts. Their note is hardly better than a scream, but it is purified by space and distance until it gains a sweetness we would not willingly miss. Swifts are very faithful to their time of coming, and are peculiarly the summer birds of cities, though London and too many lesser towns have banished them by filthy air. Skylarks sing as persistently after the summer birds have come as the blackbirds and chaffinches ; all do their best for the reputation of the resident singers, though the tomtits' various cries are waning and the missel-thrush calls no more. But now the skylark is challenged by another airy singer, less soaring, less sustained than he, but yet more exquisitely delicate. This is the titlark, or tree-pipit. When in full song he sings in air, rising from the top of a tree without saying anything about it, and then turning and floating down with a sweet strain, and wings held high above him, till he is ready to alight again, often on the very twig from which he sprang. The more powerful skylark with his far longer song, is but a rambler about the air compared with the tree-pipit in his fountain flight. On no account let us be ungrateful to the skylark, who sings for us almost all the year ; but certainly the tree-pipit in his song-flight conveys a more exquisite relish of May.

SLEEPING OUT OF DOORS

“ *Imprudente et furtive elle ouvrit la fenêtre.*”—French novel. Let us be imprudent and furtive even to the point of sleeping out of doors ! In what is known as a “single-skin ” wagon the air breathes through all night long ; there are five large windows, and the cunningly wrought roof is practically sound-proof. In this way we have slept out of doors nearly all over Scotland and England, and even in a well-known and busy London thoroughfare.

If you wish to sleep out of doors, choose a nice level place, outside scraping-reach of low-hanging branches, and away from cattle, who are apt to rub affectionately against the crutch as soon as dawn breaks. Prefer shelter to view (they seldom go together) ; once a little clump of firs in the West Highlands kept us snug and safe for two nights, out of sight and sound of a storm raging over the moor and among the mountains outside. You don’t want a view at night—and, when you wake, every dew-washed pitch is lovely. An exception to this rule was experienced in Hertfordshire, when (the only alternative being a certain Gallows Hill) the camp was pitched in darkness near the town, and the party awoke to face a row of villas, the occupants of which (neither imprudent nor furtive !) were gazing in eager rows behind large shut plate-glass windows.

To spend the night like this, in unknown surroundings, may mean, however, a pleasant surprise in the morning. For instance, somewhere near Perth a certain weakness in geography did not altogether prevent a faint surprise at being lulled to sleep by the distant singing of the sea !

Daylight proved this to be the wind climbing among a most splendid company of beeches standing as though tier upon tier up the slope of a hill, at the foot of which the wagon had spent the night.

The world has wonderful ways of wishing you good night, either by way of a sunset, or the last stirrings in the wood, the whisper of grasses, a leaf dropping in the pool, or the last shiver of the wind at dusk, drifting away like a dream. All this happens when the fashionable dinner-party is in full swing, and would seem kept on purpose for those who sleep out of doors ; and—as though to provide an antidote for the frets and irritations of subsequent indoor existence—little pictures lie hidden in the heart, to await the beckoning of remembrance.

Such little pictures almost all belong to the moment just before sinking into sleep out of doors, and steal one by one before the inner vision : the wonderful gathering of stars upon a breathless night in summer near the Ditch at Newmarket. A clear moonlight, as bright as day, upon the heather ; the moon miles high ; while past her race clouds, white, like foam, and across the cold, keen air, as though from miles away, comes the wild challenge of a stag. Again, one seems on the brink of the world, at the edge of English downs, on the very top of the Roman Camp upon the Hill of the White Horse ; at one's feet a fringe of rough grey grass, and, far below, twinkling, trembling lights of distant towns. Or one can actually catch the mad fragrance of gorse somewhere in Surrey, where the nightingales sing against each other in the darkness ; and then once more one is caught up over the Border. By the sea, among the mountains, or on the tame roadside, in a wood, or the white shores of a loch, in the heart of a green meadow, you may sleep out of doors sounder and better than under any roof. One night out of doors is worth more than two or three nights in the house, but do not believe people when they say you can do with only a very little sleep ; you will soon prove this a mistake !

It is not every one who likes sleeping out of doors or who marks with a white stone the first night passed in this

way. In the case of the writer, that first awakening to the delicious murmur of wild ring doves (in the New Forest) will never be forgotten, any more than the dream of mad elephants which, accompanying the first awaking after sleeping indoors again, resolves itself into the housemaid overhead.

LAKELAND SPORTS

Which attracts us more to-day, the dog or his master ? Certainly neither is seen to more advantage than in this sporting scene to the right of Ullswater, the pride of the whole Lake District. In a cool, green valley, enclosed by a circle of gorgeous hills, a congenial crowd—for the majority are those whose work and calling confine to these beloved parts—has gathered from outlying homes and villages to witness a performance Olympic in character and in its way unique.

Sheep dog trials are in full swing before 10. At intervals one collie after another appears with his master and takes his place in the centre of the field. Three frightened-looking sheep are seen in the distance, being driven towards him. Success will depend chiefly upon training, and whether perfect understanding has been established between dog and shepherd. Not a word is spoken ; all the dog requires is an occasional whistle or signal from his master. At a given signal he starts off gaily. The sheep, knowing nothing of the game, rush ahead, just as bewildered and stubborn as sheep can be. To avoid instant panic the collie turns aside and approaches them by a circuitous route. Thus he gently takes possession. He has first to conduct them to the course through an open gateway with a stone wall on either side. But the sheep grow suspicious, they quickly dodge past the gateway, and as often as not tear off in the wrong direction. This puts the dog's wonderful tact to the test. He approaches them more cautiously, a few yards at a time, both ear and eye intent upon his master. If the sheep

look round apprehensively or show a renewed desire to bolt he quickly stops and flings himself on the grass in a nonchalant attitude. When their confidence is regained he again edges up and seizes every chance to move them on, almost hypnotically, until the gateway is reached. To get past this is extremely difficult. If the dog is too eager in his methods it causes fluster, sometimes panic. The sheep may get separated and make a desperate dash for freedom. This would be fatal, for time is limited, and not even the cleverest sheep dog can collect his flock quickly enough to finish the trial. To-day, luckily, there are few mishaps. Through this obstacle, they are now on undulating grass, bounded at intervals by little stumps. A fairly easy progress is made along a winding route of a few hundred yards back through the original hated gateway.

But the trial is far from completed. In the middle of the big field from which the start was made a pen of three hurdles only has been erected, with an aperture just wide enough to admit one sheep at a time. Until now the shepherd has never left his position, but by the rules he may take a more active part in the actual penning. The dog conducts his charges as gently as possible towards the pen, but once that comes in sight they are perilously near stampeding. But renewed cajolery and subterfuge work wonders ; again and again they are subdued and brought back. By this time they are getting tired ; resignation has set in, and the dog is gaining ground. With his master on one side of the field, he now tries an encircling movement, till, partly by creeping along and partly by circumvention, he gradually closes in upon the sheep. They are actually brought to a standstill opposite the entrance to the pen. The next few moments seem an eternity. They stand gazing doggedly at the pen ; then, after sundry nervous glances to right and left, the foremost sheep suddenly advances. He has come to a decision. " This is the less of two evils ! " Bravely he marches into the pen. The remaining sheep pause, apparently for a brief consultation, and then meekly follow their leader's footsteps. The air is rent by a roar of delight. The

winner of to-day's sheep dog trial performed his task in a little under seven minutes.

After a few minutes for a picnic luncheon beside a running stream, we know from sounds proceeding from the usual starting-place that the "Hound Trail" is about to begin. The trail has been dragged for miles, right along the fronting circle of the hills, and all the hounds are eagerly sniffing the air and giving vent to frantic cries. At the signal every leash is slipped, and the hounds are away like a flash of lightning. One only, either wayward or slow to take up the scent, lingers behind. Even that tiny delay is fatal. The other hounds are a mile on their way. Every eye follows them, till, like a zigzag line of white thread, they finally vanish round the edge of a sharp cliff.

Half an hour passes and then a faint cry comes echoing from the adjoining fell. The hounds are telling that the trail is nearly finished. We all press forward excitedly. Who will sight the first arrival? A solitary hound has appeared on the mountain side and is rushing down impetuously. Various "sports" in the crowd eye the white spot knowingly. "Skiddaw," says one; "Kruger" another. "No, it is Thruster for certain," says a man with field glasses. "Didn't I tell you to back him?" and he turns to his friend. All doubt about Thruster is soon relieved, as the dog, with lolling tongue, comes rollicking over the green, bursts into the line, singles out his master, and plunges his nose into a luscious bowl of meat which awaits him and which he is sure his wonderful pace has overtaken! Another and another hound appears, not a whit weary, superbly unconscious of failure, each in turn to be feasted in like manner.

A remarkable feat of human endurance is to crown the day, for the "Guide" or "Fell race," as we call it, must certainly rank among the first half-dozen athletic events of the world. The competitors, hardy mountaineers, have to climb a hill almost 2,000ft. in height, and then to get back in the fastest possible time. Now they are collecting at the starting-place; every one in splendid training.



CHESTNUT TREES AT MILTON ABBAS

That man in black, little more than a lad, won the most recent Fell race in the Lake District. Beside him are many of the finest climbers, and one especially, in white jersey and shorts, "has been showing grand form of late," say the experts. They are off, and we see a dozen lithe forms making for the iron hurdle which bounds the field. Over uneven ground and stony places they stride, apparently without effort, until a plantation of fir trees, which separates the grass dale from the actual fell side, hides them from sight. There they go again; carefully picking their way past stones and through heavy undergrowth. Now they have gained the topmost reach and pass along a narrow footpath, winding to right and then to left, in single file. Some have lost a little ground. Two dark figures and one in white are ahead, keeping pretty close together. "Oor lad's reet enough," whispers an onlooker pointing to the boy in black. "He's saving his wind." "Just you watch him when he's past the flag!"

Alas! for "oor lad"! "White" was good uphill, but he is even stronger in the descent. Now he has passed the worst incline and has reached safer ground. There comes the thud, thud of his feet as he rushes through the plantation. He reappears. Down a more grassy slope he seems to be positively dancing. Now for the final fence! Has he the wind to vault? Yes, he is over like a cork—not a stumble, not a sign of exhaustion. He has won. Numbers of enthusiasts surround him joyfully and the next moment he is lost to sight in a surging, cheering crowd.

The lad in black, too, romps in, fresh and radiant, and receives his ovation, as does every other competitor as he turns up. By the time the last man comes in and flings himself dead beat on the grass the crowd of spectators has begun to depart. Tents are unpegged, horses reharnessed to their carts, which have served as benches; motors, hooting and grunting, extricate themselves and thread out their perilous way. Do I hear "John Peel" wafted by the sweet evening breeze from hill and dale?

FISHING ON ULLSWATER

The weather had been consistently wet and cold for a couple of weeks.

At last a morning came when I woke to a strange quiet. The furious tumult among the trees had ceased. So had the patter of rain. The sound of the stream was faint. A gleam of sunshine lay athwart my bed. The air was still and warm and birds were singing. In the distance a lusty cock suddenly testified his joy. After breakfast I sought out the local champion, whose skill with the rod was widely known. "Whart Jimmy doosn't kna aboot troot an' flees it's noot warth larnin," a local celebrity had informed me; and, as I had already discovered, my informant had not been far wrong. For "Jimmy the Champion" had been born and bred in the district; for years he had been a passionate fisherman; he knew the lake and the ways of trout like a book; and he had an extraordinarily keen eye (some called it an uncanny anticipation) for "a rise." I discovered him, clad in overalls, covered with grease and oil, dissecting the interior of a car. A rough cap decorated with a variety of flies was planted sideways well over the grimy, good-natured face which looked out from under it. He told me he feared it was too bright and calm for much success during daylight, and that he intended to go out for the evening rise, which, if the weather held, would be a good one. We agreed to meet where his boat was moored at 9.30 p.m., and I left him.

So many conflicting reports of trout-fishing on Ullswater have been heard, and so many visitors with high

expectations essay to reduce the number of fish within its waters, that a word regarding the excellent sport that is obtainable there, free of charge, may be useful. The fish are small, but invariably, in the early part of the season, very game, and as a rule average three to the pound. They are quick as lightning at discovering and equally quick and clever at disgorging the fictitious fly, which almost invariably is fished "wet," and not "dry"—a fact which renders it at once difficult to see the rise and very necessary to strike the moment there is the slightest indication of one. Unlike the New Zealand rainbow or large brown trout, those of Ullswater, where there is any quantity of natural feed, seldom "take" themselves. They have to be taken, and it requires a certain amount of knowledge and skill to do it.

The weather held, and a day of glorious sunshine in which all nature revelled waned to a close. I selected casts and flies—a small "Greenwell" and a somewhat larger "Alder"—and at 9 o'clock strolled through the fields to the mouth of the beck, where, securely padlocked, lay the Champion's boat. It was yet broad daylight, but the thick, flower-gay meadow grass was already dewed, and towards lower ground a thin mist of vapour was gathering. The light, occasional breeze of earlier hours had now died away, and a hush had fallen. Over the sky of fading blue a blush of pink was spreading from the west. Against it, in bold relief, stood out the hills—Place Fell to the right, to the left St. Sundays, Black Crag, and, far behind them, Striding Edge, leading up to Helvellyn. There was a scent of flowers and damp earth. The bleat of a lamb a hundred yards away, answered immediately by the low-toned response of a ewe, sounded strangely loud. Far away a cuckoo called.

The Champion was not in sight. The church-bell chimed the half-hour as I reached the stile close to his waiting boat. I climbed and sat on it, filled my pipe, and looked out on to the waters of the lake which stretched beyond. Ullswater lay before me, becalmed. Not a ripple disturbed its surface, which appeared like a huge,

dull-toned plate of transparent glass. Along its western shore its bordering trees threw reflections distinct and true. But, even as I watched, these began to fade as a pale, filmy, diaphanous cloud spread imperceptibly over the hills above them. The silence seemed to grow more intense as the minutes sped. A trout rose suddenly in the beck. I looked back the way I had come, expectant, but no one was yet in sight. I was chilly, and retraced my steps, and then, feeling what seemed to be a spot of rain, returned anxiously to the stile. To my dismay, on the peaceful surface of the lake I now perceived that raindrops were indeed beginning to fall, and as I stood gazing at them they began to increase in number and in size. Yet here and there, overhead, stars were beginning to show ; the skies were not overcast ; I felt no rain. And then reality flashed !

Neither on the lakes and rivers of Canada nor on those of New Zealand have I ever witnessed such a " rise " as I witnessed now. The hitherto placid water before me was changed with kaleidoscopic rapidity to a great bubbling, dancing, splashing space of glistening bewilderment, like that caused by a hailstorm. Hundreds, thousands of trout were jumping as far as my sight carried. It was an extraordinary spectacle. It lasted about ten minutes, and then subsided. . . . I turned, to find the Champion by my side, and told him, aggrieved, that he had missed his chance and that the rise was over. " It'll coom agin," he assured me ; and he explained, as we unmoored the boat and glided quietly past the rushes out into the open, that, on an absolutely calm night such as this, it was almost impossible to take fish until it was really dark. But even as he spoke a faint sougling was audible in a wood to port of us, and a much-desired gentle ripple appeared on the water we were approaching. We stayed our way and began to cast.

For the first half-hour I had fine sport, and at the end of that time my basket could no longer be moved with a touch, but stood solidly at my feet, revealing its gleaming contents. But, as the darkness deepened, I could no

longer see the rise, or, indeed, the top of my rod, and, after 30 minutes of fruitless and exasperating effort, I rested and watched the Champion. This man had the eye of a hawk and was in his element. At every second cast he appeared to rise a trout ; at every fourth or fifth he struck successfully and played one. While some, being lightly hooked, escaped, more were safely netted. The fun became fast and furious, and when midnight chimed the bottom of the boat at his end was covered with fish. We pulled quietly back towards the beck, near the entrance to which we again cast for 20 minutes before landing.

Then we counted the spoil. My bag of seven looked meagre compared with that of the Champion. One by one he numbered and flung the fish into a queer shaped wooden box, and the total was 38 !

RIVER-MAGIC

Much has gone to the making of the Thames mid-summer brilliance, but at last it is complete. All the winter the floods rose and fell over the miry and draggled banks, until the borders of earth and water seemed in dissolution, and the moorhens fled in perplexity to the hillside copses, and the kingfishers to the smallest tributary streams. March stanchd the floods, April and May washed the mudstained grasses and concealed them with springing herbage, and now June has brought home the last of the wandering river-birds and set free the dragonflies. A clean and brimming river runs at its right summer level, stroking the iris blades in the sunshine and filling their yellow frame with the blue of the sky. The willow-trunks in the shadowy backwaters are lit with the reflections of sleepy ripples, the happiest of all lights ; and everywhere, in the sun and the shadow, there is the fullness of mid-summer blossom and the activity of waterside life.

Great rivers have a richer flora than small ones because there is a constant exchange of seeds, borne by birds and air and water, between every part of their system. The Thames reveals hardly half its treasures in a long June day. Many water-plants build up the tall screens which empale it. Rough pond-sedge and grey-plumed reed rustle loudest in the June wind, for pond-sedge has a toothed edge, like pampas-grass, and the slender canes and long bamboo-like ribbons of the reed stir both to wind and water. Yellow iris has long swords which cool the cheek ; bur-reed blades are as smooth, but less mistily bluish, and deep in the heart of the watery thickets the scented rush

lifts its jointed green fingers. Scented rushes shed their fragrance under our boat's prow when we drive it, with a smooth swish, into the water-thickets ; it is the richest of the watery perfumes and drowns at times even the scent of clover from the hayfields. Flowering rush swings its clusters of pink blossoms among the yellow irises, and yellow loosestrife lights its branching tapers. Blue skull-cap perches primly on the little marly cliffs of the hayfields, and forget-me-not spreads sheets of turquoise blossom beneath it, at the water's edge. On the cool earth of the willow-shaded eyots creeping jenny toils after the sunshine and lifts blooms like guineas. If we wish for more flowers, there are pink marsh woundwort and yellow meadow rue and marsh St. John's wort and rampant monkey-flower all to be had for the seeking ; and in deeper water beyond the sharp leaves and pallid blossoms of the arrowheads the globed white water-lilies that began to climb towards the sunlight in March are at last exquisitely unfolding.

Much of the charm of the river in summer lies in the fascination of its depths. We know little of those dark recesses out of which the water-lily lifts its cabled head ; the eye is soon lost in the dim green light of those water-woods. At evening we may sometimes hear some vast splash, or a snort that only science could attribute to a fish, and we know that the wild beasts of the watery underworld are out and playing. But there is a mystery about the thinnest layer of that alien element ; and the fishes that swim there are never so full of happy suggestion as in June sunshine. Those that greet us as we pass above or beside them are mostly roach and dace and minnows ; their scales of green and silver are the perfection of midsummer attire. Watch some plump roach as it lets the current slide by it ; it seems gently fanning its cool throat with its fore-fins. Even the iris blades are not so coolly green as the backs of minnows at midsummer ; and, like small children, they delight to caper in the sun. One flicks his tail on the shallow, and the whole shoal flashes its armour ; they are away and back again with a speed

that diverts the idle eye, like the crooked line of the oar-blade thrust into their element.

Small dragonflies, that abound on the Thames in June, are more fairylike than the minnows. The king and queen of these fairies are the great shining pair which men of science call imperator ; he is clad in sapphire and she in emerald, and now and then we may meet them in royal progress on the Thames. Many dragonflies have separate dresses for the two sexes ; of the slow-winged kind, that drift and flap like butterflies, that dragonfly with wings all of rusty red owns as her mate one in purple. There is a male with a blue-patched wing whose mate's wings are colourless. But sometimes the newly hatched males wear their lady's dress as if to frustrate too tedious inquiry in June sunshine. More bewitching in colour and movement are the smaller dragonflies of half-a-dozen species which we call demoiselles. Some drift in pairs, others flash with the speed and more than the brightness of minnows. It is exquisite to see a flight of winged sapphires or rubies crystallize out of the light of the June sun and sky on the huge green leaf of a waterdock. June's invitation is here triumphant ; for these live jewels spent long months in the mire as rapacious grubs.

Song dies down as June advances, except by the river. The coolness of the waterside woods prolongs the music of thrushes and blackcaps and nightingales ; and the true river-singers—the reed-warbler and the sedge-warbler—prolong their song far into July. Sedge-warblers build in the bushes and herbage and mimic land-birds, but reed-warblers sling their deep nests to swing in the reeds, and their babble is like rippling waters.

It is curious how few animals bathe in hot weather. Cows love to cool their legs in the shallows, and some horses learn the same taste, but sheep and almost all wild animals, even water-rats, only enter the water for business, and not pleasure. But the fondness of many birds for bathing makes them delightful on hot June days. Ducks bathe with as much zest as schoolboys, and even corn-crakes, which we might expect to take dust-baths, like

gamebirds, may be surprised in little family bathing-parties by the river. The little goldcrest will bathe in a rain-filled hoof-print, and yellowhammers delight in a shelving roadside pond. No landbird—let makers of bird sanctuaries remember—cares to plump into deep water, though we have seen a wood-pigeon tumble deliberately from an overhanging bough and lie spreadeagled on the sunny surface. Birds bathe most after their young are fledged, and in the idle afternoon hours before their evening supper-time. Then, drifting round a bend of the Berkshire meadows in their summer's peace, we sometimes find a party of May's screaming peewits, now reassured and peaceful, preening and splashing on some warm chalky shallow. They rise with a cry of complaint and leave the landscape lonelier.

ON HELVELLYN

The church clock struck one as we gently closed the door behind us and stepped out into dim deep-blue stillness, wondering whether enough light would be vouchsafed to make our way clear. A corn-crake called at the bridge, but the beck was silent, and the quiet brooding over the dale was so complete that it gave us a curious sense of possession. The night was ours.

No one seemed to be sharing the soft breeze that gently swept over the fields standing high in hay-grass, or the scents it brought. As we passed up the rough path with Tongue Ghyll murmuring below us, though a black wall of fell rose ahead we had the feeling we were walking towards the light. Now and again we seemed to be moving through pockets of warmer air, charged with scented fern and the indescribable sweetness that rises when dew has fallen on sun-baked sheep-nibbled turf. We crossed the beck that divides Seat Sandal from the Tongue—the stepping-stones shining whitely, and began to climb up the long grassy slope. Two green glow-worm lights, almost startling in their beauty, shone at our feet, then another, and another, till the rising ground beyond the beck on our left was dotted with scores of these tiny, steadfastly-glowing lamps.

The way grew steeper and we turned to rest and look back, to find the dale in deep dark shadow, while to the west Langdale Pikes and Bow Fell could be distinguished, though as yet no light had come to dim the Great Bear, which shone above Seat Sandal, and the brilliancy of Mars, which seemed rose-red by comparison with the

paleness of the stars in Cassiopeia. We crossed the rocky knoll that for so long had loomed up before us, dropped down the stony path to the hollow, and climbed up to the Hause Gap. Here, almost suddenly, there was light. Grizedale Tarn lay half in shadow, with a ripple on the water, but at its foot shone pale turquoise, reflecting the greenish radiance of the sky between Dollywaggon and St. Sunday Crag.

Every moment the light increased, and even gave us sight of the saxifrages starring the bog near the rock where the Wordsworth brothers had their memorable parting. The wind became keener and brought with it a sense of disturbance of the sleep that is among the lonely fells. The early voice of a half-awakened mountain pipit, the call of a sheep to its black-faced lamb, came to us. Over the top of Fairfield appeared a shining orange horn of the moon, which seemed for a space to stand erect on its point before sailing up in flaming colour, to pale an hour later, at sunrise, almost to nothing.

From the top of Dollywaggon the sight of the great rocky eastern buttresses of Helvellyn was arresting by reason of their sharp contrast with the comparatively gentle western slopes, clothed with yellow, tussocky grass. There was a hint of coming beauty in the roseate glow that was stealing over the sky to north-east, while over Fairfield a long wisp of cloud gathered, looking like a great curling feather rising from a vizier. Then to the south little filmy wreaths of mist floated down the side of Seat Sandal as though making for Grizedale Tarn. But these were only heralds ; they were quickly followed by more and more, seeming like evil spirits compelled to escape before the coming of the sun. Driven by a light wind from the south-west, they were whirled past us, and in a few moments we were wrapped in a sheet of hurriedly moving grey mist. The top of Helvellyn, now only a few hundred yards distant, looked miles away. The black, jagged outline of Striding Edge appeared and disappeared. A tiny tarn—a teardrop solitary on its rocky ledge—gleamed out, and we had uncertain vision

of Ullswater. We waited, and there was a brilliant radiance behind a bank of clouds : then arrows of flaming rose, molten edges, dim forms and gleams, veiled pinnacles of fire, the whole panoply of world mystery shimmering as the great giant came forth from the uttermost part of the heaven.

Imperceptibly colour came all round us, and in one sweep of the horizon there were all the great summits, majestic, fold on fold of fell. From the west more mist rushed up, as if it, too, must see the sun appear. Then it passed and cloud was below us, our shadows thrown gigantic across it. A few moments later we were below all cloud, and there, lying clear opal before us, was the whole range from Conistone Old Man, Wetherlam, the Scafell group, Gable, The Pillar, away to westernmost Wythop and Criffel, and Blencathra in blue distance to the north.

Below us, Thirlmere, lying placid, and shining like polished steel, its tiny farms looking toylike against the green fell. The wind whispered over Williewife moor and shook the white heads of cotton grass and the purple butterworts as it passed over the boggy slopes. A cuckoo's voice reached us from the woods, four ravens croaked overhead, while fountains of song dropped from tit-larks on every side. Blue wreaths of smoke were rising from cottage chimneys as we came to Wythburn, and an hour later, just as we ended our walk, the sun appeared above the eastern rampart of fell and flooded the dale with glory.

THE CURSE OF LITTER

It was one of the most beautiful districts in the West of England ; the weather was glorious, and the meridian sun smote hotly down upon hill, valley, and ocean. Shelter on that particular eminence seemed scarce ; but here at last was a comfortable stone boundary fence overhung with young beeches and other cooling foliage, and inviting instant repose. A pipe, and all would be perfect ; but careful search produced not a single match. Was anyone likely to pass by with one ? The chances, on that height, seemed adverse.

But the *deus ex machina* actually arrived : a tall, spare, grizzled man, evidently accustomed to much tramping. The need being suggested, he opened a satchel which he carried, and proffered not a match but an entire new box, and in so doing showed that the satchel contained not one box, but many, perhaps half a gross.

No, he said, as if anticipating a question which courtesy refrained from putting ; no, he did not travel in matches, or if he did, it was only in the sense used by the bridegroom who explained that he travelled in confetti, when he came to undo his overcoat at the hotel. If he travelled in matches it was for no commercial purpose ; his object was philanthropic, aesthetic. And he heaved a sigh, and mopped his brow.

Confidence having been established, he began to speak of the hardships of his self-imposed lot ; for self-imposed it was, and he never expected to obtain any thanks or recognition for it. Daily he trudged, on an average, at least 20 miles, and a single box of matches went no distance ;

he could not say how many would be wanted in August when the holiday people would be ubiquitous ; the work was quite bad enough now, and later on he feared he might succumb to it. To a certain extent the fine weather was responsible, for it brought the trippers, the picnickers, and the ramblers generally out ; on the other hand wet weather, if it kept the multitudes down, prevented him from accomplishing his task. But then again, if it was impossible on wet days, it had to be done with much more care in periods of drought, for grass, gorse, and heather then became like tinder, and he had to see that his fires did no damage.

A superb part of England, this—he went on, but utterly changed since he was a boy. This was his third season, so to speak ; three years ago he had retired from London and crowds and noise, and had come with the brightest anticipations of finding peace and nature unsullied in the West of his upbringing. At that moment he interrupted his discourse, darted forward into a patch of bracken, hooked out upon the pathway with his stick a dirty old newspaper, put a match to it, and saw that it burnt itself out.

That was his job, he explained, his business in life now, if we had not already guessed it. Burning up the accursed, disfiguring, disgusting remains of other people ; complete and total savages, whatever their social status, their means, their education, their personal and domestic habits. It was extraordinary how quite decent persons, who would tolerate nothing unclean or slovenly at home, forgot themselves on an outing in the country. They threw away their paper without a thought for the pleasures of others ; the more a place was esteemed as a “ beauty-spot ” the worse they befouled it. Local people, he added, were every bit as bad as casual strangers. Look at L——, for instance : ruined by old newspapers, old bags, old ‘chocolate wrappings, old cigarette cases ; one knew the different colours of the various brands, and cursed the manufacturers’ sense of prettiness. Look at C——, where there was a precipice of unsurpassed natural beauty, and hundreds daily came to see the view from it, and faithfully

ON THE SOUTH DOWNS



shot their refuse down the slope. In these days of universal trippers, and country holidays, and half-holidays for all, the best parts of England would soon be submerged in litter ; but nobody seemed to mind. He would like to see offenders fined pretty heavily, but the expense of detection would be enormous.

So he did what he could, in his own dearest *angulus terrarum* ; but he knew it was sheer quixotry. Fire, too, was a dangerous element ; and few, especially in this weather, could be relied upon to consume their leavings without blackening a hillside, either by accident or on purpose. The present year would be critical for him ; unless local authorities woke up to defend the scenery which brought money into their district, no one with an eye for nature could stay in the country. He thought next year he would probably be moving back to London.

But he must say good-day ; he knew of a place whitening with his own peculiar harvest, and he felt bound to make for it without wasting more time. *Pagina ne nimium crescat* were his last overheard words, before he pounced upon another provocation.

ALL THE FUN

“Eh! but that’s a lil’ prancy toad!”
“Iddn’ it a lil’ deur!”

A small dark pony who has jumped so often at local shows (always refusing at the first fence as a matter of routine) that he has become the pet of the countryside had danced on to the course from the shelter of the clump of trees which serves for stable, paddock, and weighing-in tent, on the tips of his toes, like an animated iron filing. Having done what was unanimously expected of him at the first hurdle, he cleared the remaining two and the gate, to which he showed the neatest pair of heels that could be desired, as though nothing but a ten-foot jump would stop him, and pranced “toadishly” back to his stable. If “Nipper” did not get a prize at this meeting, there would be a popular riot.

“Jorrocks,” the next entry, was as far from being a “lil’” toad as could well be imagined. Amid a gale of laughter, in romped the largest colt ever seen, but with legs as clean as any at Olympia. Of the size and weight of a young cart-horse, and with the manners of a puppy, he came on like a Crusader and—fell at the first fence. That, however, was mere play. “Aw, the vicious toad,” was the comment. (“Toad” is to the language what a pasty is to the menu.) But he stood more like a lamb until his rider was up again, rushed the remaining hurdles with a clear 3ft. to spare, and, judging from the way he took the gate, must prove the despair of his owner, who probably deduced his jumping powers from the success with which he breaks out from every paddock and moor where he is still running.

The two "toads," the "lil'" one and the "vicious" (but that is a libel), rather take the colour out of the other performers, and a move was soon made back to the "course." Here the pauses between the races were very long and filled with a variety of foot-races, potato, egg-and-spoon, and hop, skip, and jump contests, where earnest farm youths with incredible quiffs, vied, quite successfully, in braces and stiff collars with their scarcely more earnest, though more professional, friends in shorts and stockinged feet. These pedestrian interludes are necessarily rather long in order to give the ponies time to get their second wind—most of the entrants appearing in race after race. They are good ponies, too, some of them; clean bred, and on a sound grass field leave the stockier "home-bred" cobs standing. In the winter, though, with the fox half a moor ahead, and bog up to the fetlock as far as the eye can reach, intersected with high and rotten banks, it is another tale altogether.

The best two ponies were ridden by boys splendidly turned out in flaming red and yellow, and afforded some close finishes. Nipper, the "lil' toad," who is never, in these meetings, pushed "all out," leads the field after the first round, on the principle of the first of the last lot being equivalent to the last of the first. The course is three times round the field, but there was no stopping the jockeys in the first race. "Stop!" cried some, and, as soon as the riders began to draw rein, "Naw! Goo on. Round again!" cried others, and the jockeys, nothing loth, went on. When finally they did finish, a lively altercation ensued between the winner and the self-styled "Clurk of the course," a popular local farmer named Lew, with a voice that would do credit to a sergeant-major.

"I caal'd on yew to stop. Why did yew goo for to goo on?" cried the official.

"Goo on was what I yeard," was the answer. "Didn' neither, yew. Stop was what I said." "Well—," a pause. "Goo on was what I yeard, and I goo'd on. Well, then—."

The problem was solved by the production of a dinner bell. As the leading horse came up the straight on the penultimate lap, the police sergeant, a mellow, round-faced, soft-eyed villager, seized the bell and rang it vigorously in the face of the approaching pony. Enough to turn any self-respecting, "up-country" horse back on his tracks or into the rails and the cheering spectators, but the West-Country ponies understand such things and merely lengthen their stride for the last lap.

The clump of trees in the middle of the course rather obstructs the view, but that lends an added excitement to the hurdle race, when "tap, tap, tap" conducts the ear, fence by fence, round the corners where the eye cannot follow. Most of the ponies scarcely rose at the low hurdles, preferring to carry a rail or so on their knees. One, however, who cleared the remnants (which dwindled with every round), continued to rise at every jump about four feet, even when nothing was left but a gap.

The gymkhana is a relic of the ancient and traditional "club walking," when the gala day used to begin with a Church service and continue with banners and ribbons in procession to a dinner, after which followed a little relaxation on the part of the older club-members, while the younger ones exerted themselves tirelessly in various forms of "foot prowess" and wrestling. Now, however, speed is the thing; the dinner has disappeared, as has the Church service where nine-tenths of the population are Methodist. Cars line the lanes and the hedges, the only horse-drawn vehicle being an old-fashioned buggy whose owner, a keen huntsman, rounded the Horn before he was twelve, chased slavers up the Persian Gulf and in the Straits, and now spends his time on his farm.

The last race—at 8 p.m.—develops into a mere rag. For three consecutive years the owner of Nipper (the "lil' prancy toad") has met with an accident, and now the day is incomplete without the accident. All day he has not ridden for a win. Now he must ride for a fall. He gets it—on the soft side of the course—and spectators and ponies alike disperse, happy in a day of care-free fun

where the very bookmakers—two only—shift their stands with the shifting centres of interest and call out to the great Lew: “What’s that one, daddy? Which one’s that?” and offer, continuously and without prejudice: “Evens on the field,” and “Two to one Oddity.” During the whole afternoon there were only two takers. Our local gymkhana, which is held neither for charity nor for profit, but for fun, refuses to be commercialized, and within one field at any rate no betting tax is enforced.

THE TITHE BARN

The barn stands at the upper end of the paddock, four square to the winds of heaven, and about 50 paces from the rest of the rectory home farm buildings, of which it was once an intimate part. That is plain enough in a dry summer, when the outlines of the foundations of connecting buildings long since demolished are clearly visible through the parched grass ; then, too, one can trace the lines of the road to the barn, and through it down to the gate in the cherry orchard and on to Paradise lane.

Until a few years ago Paradise lane was a regular thoroughfare from the cottages at that end of the village to Maiden's Spring, which, never known to fail, was famed far beyond the boundaries of the hamlet, and in the prolonged droughts of 1911 and 1921 was the sole source of supply for the villagers, who had used it from time immemorial ; but the laying on of water to the village has changed all that, and neither bucket nor pail clatters to the spring now. But it serves another purpose, for the never-ceasing dribble, changed in these wet times to a steady stream, overflows from the dipping hole at one end of a quaggy hollow—wherein, if you believe tradition, there lie the bones of a Cromwellian soldier, horse and all, who came to water his beast and got bogged—down a clear gravel runnel to the watercress beds. There a sluice-gate turns it through the beds or into a channel across the lower end of the glebe, where the snake's head fritillaries grow as thickly as in any Thames-side meadow.

Up to about three generations ago, when the service of the Church seems to have lost its hold on the cadets of

the family, the barn fulfilled its original purpose—the storage of the parson's tithe—and, if capacity counts for aught, the parson ancestors of that time must have been passing rich in tenths of the fruits of the earth. Honestly built of timber on a low foundation of red brick of the kind still made at a local kiln, much of the barn is of the date carved on the lintel of the door—1702—and as the framework is of roughly squared oak and the lichen-covered, tiled roof has been religiously kept in repair, the old place shows singularly few signs of decay. As tithe barns go it has no claim to hoary age, but as an example of stout village carpentry it can have few equals ; the long ridge of the roof has no sag in it and the airiness of the place has doubtless saved the timber from the ravages of the death-watch beetle. The great doors, large enough to pass a loaded hay wagon, still work freely on their hinges—huge iron strap-like affairs, carried right across the framework ; and for all his years the fox on the ridge-end, spitted through the body, still turns to the faintest breeze.

At one end of the barn hang relics of the past, a pair of well-worn flails, an old hand-made sieve, and an evil-looking man-trap set with ferocious teeth—a huge edition of the modern gin. Hanging on the wall, the almost undecipherable legend “ Man traps set here ” tells its own tale. An ancient lantern fashioned of iron with panes of thick glass and a central socket for a candle, with the end of a tallow “ dip ” still in it, hangs on a bracket by the door, in curious contrast to an electric bulb dangling from the roof. Two primitive wooden rattles take one back to nursery days when it was the business of the daft lad of the village to scare the rooks away from the ripening blackheart cherries in the orchard, and as he was up with the rooks and did not go to bed till they did, the distant rattle and the echoing caws of the birds were usually the first and last sounds to reach the nursery windows. In fine weather the birds would go through what to childish eyes always seemed the most complicated aerial evolutions, circling round and round, over and under

each other, describing figures of eight, all with apparently mathematical precision and effortless ease, and gradually mounting higher and higher till they were mere specks in the blue above the orchard ; but directly the boy went home to his midday meal they would sweep noiselessly down on to a particular cherry tree, only to rise again a moment afterwards in a black cloud and pandemonium of noise when Jesse, the bailiff, fired off a scatter gun from his cottage door.

It is when a hurricane blows from the south-west and there seems real menace in the wind that the work of the barn-builders of old is strained to what must sometimes surely be near to breaking point. The rafters and the roof principals groan and grumble and creak under the strain, while the weather-boarding of the sides and ends patters a persistent vibrato ; every crevice and knot-hole in the boarding sings, moans, or shrieks its own note up and down the scale as the wind rises and falls, while the flapping doors play a big-drum accompaniment. The tiles rattle like corncrakes and occasionally one of them, its oak pin loosened, clatters down over the roof and thuds on to the grass beneath. As the gale gathers force the din becomes a witches' chorus which works up, crescendo, till an exceptional gust strikes the place broadside on ; then there is a deafening crash, followed instantly by a kind of muffled, surging scurry over the roof, and a momentary silence while the whole barn shudders. Except for these rare culminating moments there is no such note of destruction or impending disaster as there is, for instance, among trees in a gale.

Some day, perhaps, before winds of unrecorded strength gather the barn to their bosom, the old place may serve some useful purpose again. At present, its original purpose fulfilled, it stands as an interesting reminder of an interesting past.

WINGS AND STINGS

In one thing at least the country dweller will grant an alleviation in the lot of the man tied to town during the heats of the latter summer : the citizen has no wasps to fight with. In the heart of the country wasps can be a serious affliction in the fruiting-time of the year, appearing in force punctually with the later gooseberries and the early plums, and lasting on to ravage the apples and pears. There is considerable variation in their numbers from season to season. Sometimes they are so abundant that fruit-picking may have to be done after dusk has fallen and the marauders have gone home ; sometimes only a few strays may be seen.

It may be timely to consider the ways of the wasp in a season when the observer is able to regard them with a more detached equanimity than is customary in these isles. There have been well-meant attempts in recent times to rehabilitate the wasp's reputation, representing him as a useful scavenger and destroyer of house-flies ; but for most of us he remains *hostis humani generis*, one of the plagues which come to us with the exuberance of life in summer weather, an antidote to any risk of too enervating luxury. Like almost all the other tribes whose proper function is to serve mankind by reducing the numbers of other injurious creatures—such as the birds which ought to confine themselves to the annihilation of slugs and snails, caterpillars and aphids—the wasp neglects his sanitary function with flies the moment there is any passably ripe fruit about, and will (if protective measures are not taken in time) even raid it when it has taken the shape of house-

hold jam. His speed and ubiquity, his supreme contempt for human importance, his readiness with his extremely unpleasant and sometimes dangerous sting, whether in open attack or when lying *perdu* in fallen fruit, the very menace of his acrid black and yellow colour-scheme, all go to make him a consolatory thought to the man in populous city pent during September. The countryman outlaws him, in spite of professorial warnings about the balance of Nature, and levies on him a somewhat doubtful war. In a bad wasp year *al fresco* meals may be too heroic a venture ; but there is no need to suffer from an indoor invasion, if the easy precaution is taken of fitting to open windows light frames covered with large mesh gauze or " hexagon netting," which will exclude both wasps and flies, but not fresh air.

Something may be done to save fruit crops by the traditional method of hanging wide-mouthed bottles of beer and sugar in the trees ; but the only efficacious defence is by attacking, in the way that the Navy deals with piratical harbours, the enemy in their lairs. Wasps' nests are not always easy to find, although there may be some hundreds in a square mile or so of country. A large one may exist in a garden for some time before a chance encounter or the sight of the converging flight of the yellow bodies points out the door of the robbers' cave. Wasps range far afield, and the source of the raids may be a quarter of a mile away. The destruction of the nests must be done after dark, when the swarm is in for the night ; daylight operations leave a horde of homeless and incensed bandits at large. The old-fashioned way of taking a nest with a firework of some kind was an exciting adventure : the lantern, the squib, the matches, the spade for sodding down the conflagration, made the expedition, as it stands in early memories, a rather fearful joy. There was always the chance that the solitary wasp standing sentinel in the mouth of the hole might pass the word to the army below before the infernal machine had fairly got to work, and so the grass and the air would be full of foes only visible as they hurtled against the lantern, or felt as they got their stings home. Nowadays



UNLOADING THE CATCH AT YARMOUTH

the common use of cyanide of potassium—that ghastly poison which looks like crushed sugar—has reduced both the romance and the risk. It is worth noting that if the entrance is downwards, and not uphill, to the nest a pint of cold paraffin is as efficacious as the stuff which has to be signed for in the poison-book. If on the morning after the raid all is quiet at the place the nest should be dug out ; and it is worth the trouble to remove it with as little damage as possible, in order to observe the laminated structure of tough, whitey-grey paper filling the spherical cavity dug out in tiny pellets by the working wasps. The cells are in circular combs, ranged horizontally tier above tier, filled with shiny white grubs, or larvae in every stage of development—a deadly bait for coarse fish.

The tree-wasp, smaller and less common than its subterranean relative, makes a nest of paper, but it is usually suspended, with the entrance at the lowest point, in the twigs of a bush or shrub. The material used by both orders is—an anticipation of modern invention—wood-pulp, chiefly obtained from oak timber. On sunny days the insects may be seen rasping their supplies from oak posts and palings, and in the spring they offer an easy chance of cutting off at one blow the existence of a whole colony. If a queen be watched and tracked she may be seen to enter a hole in the ground ; and if the spot be dug up the first beginnings of the nest may be found—a little parachute-shaped comb of five or six cells, suspended by the apex from a fibre of grass-root in the hole. If left unmolested the work proceeds rapidly, and the brood hatches and carries on the excavation and comb-building until by September the stock is thousands strong. The chills of autumn enfeeble the workers, and the first sharp frost puts an end to them. Only the young queens survive, hibernating in sheltered corners, till the sun in April calls them forth to dig and build again and renew their ancient warfare against mankind and his works, his choicest gages, his nectarines and jargonelles.

TWO SCENTS OF SUMMER

Of all the scents which in turn mark the course of the seasons, and for many people carry more lasting impressions than sights and sounds, none is so distinct and pervasive as the smell of the hay. The most incongruous connexion with the footlights, in a remembered cliché of the theatre, is a tribute to its representative character as a symbol of rural pleasures. It is possible that the charm of that perfume has much less appeal to-day than it possessed a generation ago : it is, as nearly all the olfactory sensations are, very largely dependent on the fund of associative memories, and in the course of economic changes fewer and fewer of us have known either the toils or the pleasures of the hayfield.

For those who once on a time worked with scythe, fork (prong or pikel, to give the dialects their due), or mere rake, or who romped among the wind-rows or joined the labourers at their tea by the tanned haycock in the mead, the first warm airs of June which draw across a mown field can arouse sentiments of oddly disproportionate power. The whiff, delicate and clean, of new-mown hay, which is so closely imitated by the flowers of the plant woodruff, is the most potent element in the scale : its name has been taken ere this into the repertory of the professional perfume-makers ; but there are other nuances of the exhalation of drying and dead herbage. The wilted swathes which have lain for a day in sun and wind, and have been turned by the fork or the "scaler," have a richer and stronger smell than that of the fresh-cut grass with the dew still upon it. The prevailing

atmosphere of the country when hay-harvest is in full swing, it pervades the recollections of pitching-up or raking after the wagon, of the warning shout to the man on the load to stand fast as the horse, munching his mouthful snatched from the next cock, moves forward along the slowly clearing field. When the hay is in stack, and the natural sweating or fermentation of its bulk begins, there is a further development, a rather heavy and heady fume, which to some tastes may seem to touch rankness, but to the good countryman is only one more remembered mark in the calendar of the year. Then comes the final stage, the aroma of well-got hay, which will last for years until the fibres perish in dust or moulder in damp. This is the smell which at any time of year, in the truss cut from the rick by the cowman's broad knife, or piled up in the stable rack out of the loft, or met with in wagon-loads in city streets or on trucks in railway-sidings, can bring to men with the right background to their lives searching memories of one of the best hours of country summer. It is a true touch among the uninspired moralizing of Wordsworth's "Farmer of Tilsbury Vale" which tells of the hapless old exile from the country

Up the Haymarket hill he oft whistles his way,
Thrusts his hands in a waggon, and smells at the hay.

There is no sense of loss, as there may be when the woodman's bill begins to lay low the hazels in the copse, at the sight of the mower attacking the grassy sea, bronzed with its seed-heads above the lush green bottom, set with drifts of campion and dog-daisies; the business is part of the annual round, and gives no time for the growth of such regrets as may find room in the longer cycle of the woodman's trade. The anniversary of haytime is a festival, not an obsequy; the prevalent atmosphere of the season has none of the melancholy associations of the raw smell of oak sap and shattered spray when the axes thud in the shaws in spring.

For all that the novelists have said or sung about withered grass and fallen trees, no genuine rustic will ever put the two into the same category. But there is one

tree whose flourish seems to be peculiarly joined with the cutting of the grass. The elder is never far from the hayfield, and it blooms exactly at the time when the meadows are ripe for mowing. The broad cream-white panicles among the black-green leafage hang over the hedge, swaying to the breeze as the long ripples course across the grass beneath them; and their scent, in all country recollections, is inextricably mingled with that of the hay. It is a strange scent, hard to describe except by opposites—harsh but honeyed, austere and fulsome, with a suggestion at once of dusty dryness and rank power. In itself, most would say, it is decidedly unpleasant, but by the trick of associated ideas a spirit of the scene and hour which we would not change for any other—not even for the faint sweetness of dog-roses on the briar or a hint of strawberry-rows. Nature has linked the elder and the hayfield together, both in place and time; and perhaps it is something in the contrast of their essences which gives its richest pleasure to the breath of midsummer air.

CLOUD MOUNTAINS

For too many of us nowadays the only vista in which we can watch the changes of the sky is the narrow strip overhead between the houses in a street. Even in the open country the wonted field of vision may be confined, robbed of its full verge, by trees, buildings, or rising ground. The man whose dwelling-place possesses what is called "a view," a site sufficiently elevated to look out over hedgerows and copses and neighbouring slopes to a far-off horizon, a panorama of hill and dale, spires and towers, a thousand fields, perhaps a glimpse of sea, has the advantage of commanding, besides the landscape, the whole theatre of the cloudscape. On the score of weather wisdom alone the great expanse enables the watcher to guess the chances of calm or storm with far more likelihood than one whose view is balked by his own garden trees or his neighbours' chimney-pots. To be able to see a thunder system massing forty miles away, or the first sign of the lifting of rain-clouds along a range of hills, not only helps the prophet to a probable forecast, but shows him something of the intricate business of the sky.

Some of the most exquisite passages of colour in unclouded air lie low down towards the horizon; the full gradation of blue, from the depth of liquid azure at the zenith to pale turquoise and aquamarine at the verge, can be appreciated only from a commanding vantage-point. But it is in the cloud world that the unbroken span of vision affords the fullest opportunity for knowledge and delight. The alpine chains of huge cumulus can be seen in their full grandeur only at long

range ; near at hand their pinnacles and buttresses, toppling crags and deep ravines, are hidden by the folds of their dark bases and lost in the formless mists wreathed along their sides. Twenty miles away their summits stand clear in dazzling whiteness hard as marble, but plastic to incessant change. Here a peak climbs skywards, the uprush of cubic miles of vapour translated by distance into a motion too gradual for the eye to follow, but as sure as the pace of the shadow on the dial ; here a promontory a league long heels over and begins to descend in an enormous scroll. There is never a moment of rest in the evolution of the masses ; either they are building up in steady vertical growth, hardening their contours, heaping pillar on pillar along their flanks, or they are breaking down and dissolving the clear-cut edges softening into wreaths of spray, the complexity of their sculptural detail disintegrated into looser and vaguer forms.

If the sun strike the cloud mountains on the flank they look as massive and solid as any actual heights of snow-clad granite ; if it be behind them they betray their nature by a translucency of the topmost spires and shoulders—alabaster rather than marble—yet even so hardly to be thought of as shapes of mist and water. And in their most opaque and rocklike guise they are always “ the travelling mountains of the sky ” ; the vastest concourse of them all is visibly on the march, a majestic procession behind the fixed points of the land horizon. This transit, especially when it is at right angles to the watcher’s view, may, for the unity of its action, the scale of its parts, and the speed implied by their distance, fairly be called the most impressive of sustained motion which nature can show. The movement of waves is too irregular, the course of the stars too slow to human perceptions, to come into comparison with the pacing of a great cloud system before the wind. Even when it is near us, and approaches the zenith, there is no semblance of haste in its progress. Its bulk seems to expand as it comes on ; there are subtleties of perspective which confuse the relation of its planes and often leave us doubting what is really vertical precipice,

what receding slope or level underside of the horizontal base.

Those who have tried to calculate whether an oncoming thunderstorm on a slant of wind will reach or pass by their standpoint know the part perspective plays, in the swift reaching-out of black arms of vapour which suddenly hide the sun and wrap them in the heart of the storm. At other times the prospect from high ground may assure us of security ; to right or left may lie a continent of tempest, battlemented tops lifted above banks of heaped and formless vapour where the thunder rolls incessantly, while on the other side stretches a space of quiet blue, widening slowly as the commotion drifts away, till all at once the sun is out, sparkling on the leaves which hold only a few sparse drops of rain.

COLOUR IN THE FIELDS

It is always a pleasant sight to see the long parallels of the farmers' seed-drills breaking out across the tilth left by the harrows, vivid green upon brown or deep red of the loams, ochre-yellow of the clays, grey of the chalk-downs. The lines are a sort of script, the signature of man's handiwork on the soil ; and their character tells of the skill and standards of the maker. They may be crooked or straight as a ruler, level in due thickness or patchy with gaps and over-crowded plant, clean or foul and half hidden by smothering weeds. They stripe the fields between autumn and early summer with early and late-sown corn ; and when wheat and oats are coming into ear in forward places, the drills are green again with mangold and swede and turnip. When Charles Kingsley wrote of " The Poetry of a Root-Crop," he seems to have had in mind the storage in winter clamps, for he speaks of the treasure-house of russet swede and golden globe locked up beneath the snow.

Root-crops, though a prosaic subject beside the associations of the grain-harvest—the turnip is a vulgarian, and there is almost a touch of the comic in a mangold-wurzel—have to discerning eyes their poetry in every stage, not least when they are in their green infancy, in July. They are a chancy crop, at the mercy of weather and pests in a way that corn rarely knows. Drought is a pitiless foe, and the fly may wipe out successive sowings of turnips and swedes. The labour which they require is exacting ; the thinning of the young plant must be carried out to time, and is a hard and tedious job, whether done by the south-country method of singling with the hoe, an extremely

nice and skilful business, or by the northern plan of "creeping," in which the workers, men and women, on sack-protected knees, crawl along the stitches and twitch out the superfluous plants with the fingers. In the singled field, when the work is properly done, the lines, which stood almost as thick as mustard and cress, show a barely visible thread of green ; but in growing weather, as the smooth seed-leaf, vulnerable to the attack of the agile little beetle so unsuitably described as "fly," is succeeded by the rough and hairy later growth, the drills thicken again almost beneath our gaze, and hasten to cover the soil with luxuriant tops.

Root-crops in full growth afford fine passages of colour, which seen in large widths are a characteristic note of agricultural landscape. A turnip-field shows a heavy green, with touches of emerald where the undersides of the leaves show translucent to the sun. A crop of swedes offers an expanse of blue-green with a purplish cast ; mangold leaves are yellow-green, with silvery reflexes on their glossy upper surfaces. When the roots are in full growth in late summer, they make rich contrasts with the ripening corn ; in a rolling down-country, where a high view-point gives an outlook over great slopes of unhedged field, the parti-coloured chequerwork of squares has a beauty unlike any other aspect of cultivated ground. The acres of blue and green and purple of the root-crops, the yellow or red-brown of wheat, the rose-grey of fallow land, all pale and light under the broad aerial perspective, have here and there a plot of mustard-hued rape or drift of scarlet poppies to break the regularity of the square fields. And if clouds are drawing across a sunlit sky, their shadows creeping over the hillsides work incessant change in the inlay of tints. A width of rape, flaring in full sun with a force almost more than the eyes can bear, comes next to a piece of swedes, steel-blue in shade ; the high light on the dusty white of ripe oats goes out while a mangold-plot kindles suddenly to golden green as a ray steals along it. But whether the light be cloudless sunshine, or broken in alternate glooms and gleams, or broad and even under the

grey of coming rain, there is perfect harmony in every juxtaposition of the tones.

As the root-crops grow in the field, it is the foliage which makes the great part of their colour-schemes. As they reach maturity the pigments in the bulbs begin to show through the greenery ; but to appreciate their full value we must see the crop lifted. As the roots are piled about the field or are heaped up in the carts we can note the rich variety of colour in the great globes and cones. But no one will fully grasp the range and beauty—the word is none too strong—of the colouring of roots who has not seen them, picked specimens, massy spheres, cleaned and graded, laid out in competing heaps on the turf for judging at an agricultural show. Turnips display the largest variety—strong greens, deep plum-purples, dull crimsons, each in striking contrast with the white underside of the bulbs ; the swedes are chiefly purplish or russet, with a metallic sheen which imitates the patina of bronze ; the mangolds are mainly in shades of orange and greenish-yellow, but break into surprising variations of saffron, mahogany, and even pink and rose.

THE LAMB SALES

The day is cool and grey, with mist halfway down the hillsides of the Welsh border country, and in the flat meadow in the valley bottom, half encircled by a bend of the river in brown flood, the turf is poached into deep mud by the hooves of some 5,000 lambs which have been brought down from the hill farms for the yearly sale. All the morning they have been streaming through the village, their fleeces tinted after the traditional custom with a red or saffron or primrose yellow, a realization of Virgil's coloured flocks.

They are driven into narrow pens of iron hurdles, with uproar of vehement baaing, shouts of drovers and yelps of dogs. At noon a bellman perambulates the streets, and from the half-dozen publichouses the farmers and dealers pour out to the sale ground. For the rest of the day the auctioneer chants with brazen voice his tireless refrain: "Lot twenty-five, Mr. Pugh, of the Pentre, forty lambs. At fifty shillings? Come, make an offer! Forty-five? Mr. Cadwallader, you'll say forty-four? Forty-three bid; forty-four; the last bid at forty-four!" and the stump of ash plant which acts as a hammer falls on the desk. The crowd is made up of little farmers and larger farmers, dealers, nondescript drovers; among them are typical faces from the Welsh side of the border, with high cheek-bones, pink complexions, and black side whiskers. The day wears on slowly under a quiet rain; as the lots are sold they are let out of the pens and driven off the field, with renewed hubbub of bleating lambs and yelping dogs.

A lamb sale on Sussex Downs, at the same season as the Welsh auction, shows some of those contrasts of scene and method which make up so large a part of the charm of English country life—differences too rapidly passing away. Here the day chances to be warm and bright, and the little red-roofed town beneath the slope of the sale-ground and the whale-backed downs which encircle it are intensely clear in the harvest sunshine. The southern gathering seems to be better contrived than the western, more orderly and more leisured, as if it had a longer tradition and practice behind it. The sheep-pens are of oak wattles, instead of rusty iron, with more room for the lambs inside them, and there are cabbages slung from the wattles for the stock to nibble at; wide streets of turf run between block and block. Though a few of the lots are soberly tinted with ochre, most of them trust to their perfect fleeces unadorned to attract the buyers. The shepherds here seem to have a better understanding with their charges than the vociferous Celts with theirs, guiding them with long-practised persuasion. The dogs, mostly of the old bob-tailed breed, present the most noticeable of the differences between the Celtic and the Saxon ways. They lie quiet, nose on paws, each by his master's crook stuck up alongside the pen, never making a sound the whole afternoon unless called upon to start a huddled lot of lambs or head off a bolting stray, and then giving no more tongue than is needed for neat efficiency. It is instructive to compare these composed business-like guardians with the gaunt cross-grained curs whose furious barking never ceased the day long and at times drowned the auctioneer's stentorian note.

The south-country shepherds as a body show a distinctive character, now chiefly seen in survivals. The prevailing type is lantern-jawed, big-nosed, with ragged beard, sandy or grizzled, beneath a well-scraped chin. One striking figure—"Darkey" to his mates—with strongly marked features, a hawk-nose, a fell of grey locks, black-swarthy skin and gold rings in his ears, looks more



HAYMAKING NEAR GORING

like a pirate or a smuggler than a shepherd ; perhaps he had an ancestor who kept sheep by day and ran cargoes at night, as they once did on Sussex Downs.

Farther up the slope and away from the pens, the stir and sounds of the sale are reduced to due proportion in the perspective of the sunlit hills. The crowd shifts and circles below, following the auctioneer as he moves his wheeled pulpit from lot to lot, attended by his two scribes. Wagons, red or light blue, with their teams of great slow horses, cross between the grassy lanes ; with them go motor-lorries, some double-decked and loaded on both decks with ram-lambs too stout to travel comfortably on the hoof. The scene is a strange mixture of old and new, and raises a question whether the progress of agriculture, upwards or downwards, will much longer leave us any of the graces here before us. If the signs of the times seem of gloomy omen, there is at least the selfish consolation that something of the old ways, by Welsh hills or Sussex Downs, may last out our time.

SUMMER STORMS

With the first days of unclouded June sun the weather is apt to brew those conditions which have given ground for the sardonic description of English summer as "three hot days and a thunderstorm." For several reasons—among them we may perhaps reckon the reign of science and the growth of easy and sheltered ways of living—we seem to have ceased to a large extent to respond to the more dramatic exhibitions of the weather. A destructive gale, a whelming snowfall, a great thunderstorm, have lost for us a good deal of the impressiveness which they held for a simpler generation. It is when there are electric disturbances that we fail most of all to interest ourselves in elemental shows: thunder and lightning, though our temperate climate rarely affords the terrific displays of tropical examples, can give us enough of majestic power and of terror, in the generous and wholesome sense of the word, to produce a sense of awe—an experience apt to be missed by the ordinary observer of Nature's minuter phenomena.

Electric weather-signs offer large opportunities for outdoor observation. To many people the first hint of a storm comes with the low roll of distant thunder, or even with the dazzling flash; to a practised watcher the signals may have been clear for half the day. A certain unrest and excitability in cloud-shapes, a tendency on the one hand to the formation of a system of streaming webs of gossamer vapour, criss-crossed and contorted, and on the other of hard-edged, crested cirrus, is warning enough of the gathering powers, before the lower clouds under the

canopy begin to throw up crisped heads towards the zenith, mocking one another with curious repetition of form, and long before the tops of the huge mountain-masses of cumulus—the “thunder-piles” or “judges’ wigs” of country folk—rise far away beyond the horizon. There is no absolute certainty of storm in the most ominous shows of electric cloud, as farmers and gardeners know too well when they watch, with many memories of hope deferred, for the breaking up of a settled drought. Some unknown interference may divert or disperse the mobilization of the rain-bearing vapours as completely as it can falsify the forecasts of the meteorologists who rely on their telegraphic reports of approaching depressions, established or disestablished anticyclones. But when there is no counter-check, the massing and deployment of the forces of the storm go on with a most impressive unity and comprehensiveness. The motion of the enormous cloud-piles, which can dwarf the tallest Alps, is in itself an absorbing spectacle ; they sail on the wind, and their masses mount and expand, at a pace which is too slow for the eye to measure, but which gives to the mind an impression of equable and irresistible energy. Their summits may be of dazzling whiteness ; but their flanks, with toppling precipices and heaped-up buttresses, are usually flushed with a dull coppery glow, and the horizontal lines of their bases are of black-purple gloom. Before the storm breaks all the structural details of the cumulus are lost in vague curtains of vapour ; the hard-edged summits begin to fray out into fan-shaped canopies ; vast forward-reaching veils of ashy grey hide the core of the tempest. There is a dead stillness in the air, which perceptibly affects wild life ; an arch of black mist, with ragged fringes trailing and coiling low towards the ground, drags onwards with gathering speed, and beneath it glimmers a blank wall of the coming rain.

As the first big drops begin to spatter, a sudden gust of wind blows fiercely from under the black arch, and with it comes the blink of the first near flash and the crack of the overhead peal. The light may be only a broad blaze or

pulsating flicker, the reflex of the unseen discharge, or it may be the hard-edged sinuous track of the actual bolt or "fork," whose redoubling curves, very like those of a mountain torrent, generations of illustrators, unimproved by Turner's vivid truth or by the records of photography, have conspired to misrepresent by angular zigzags. The colour of the electric fire as it reaches our eyes is somewhat variable, according to atmospheric conditions. It is often of blinding whiteness, but sometimes shows a bluish or pale purple tint; at night it may be rose-pink, and in a storm at daybreak, with a setting moon, it will show a lurid red. There is even more variety in the quality of the thunder—a stunning detonation, a roar and rumble as of mountains falling, a rending crash like the sweeping away of forests, a dry crackle, a majestic long roll echoed from cloud to cloud, an earth-jarring boom which ends the peal.

As a thunderstorm comes on with a sense of boding and unrest, it departs with something like a benediction. The lightning pulses at longer intervals, and the listener, who scarcely marked a heart-beat between the flash and the clap, counts his five, 10, 20 seconds before the dying roll of the thunder answers the winking fire. A gap of blue opens overhead; the trailing fringes of the storm are crossed by a rainbow or lit by a broad sunset glow. The earth sends up the delightful reek of timely rain; the last low peal is hardly heard for the music of the birds singing in chorus among the sparkling and dripping boughs.

ON THE BROADS

" Handsome, my woman ! " a girl cried to the baby she was trying to soothe, and the baby broke into smiles directly. The girl's appearance was exactly the same as that of every young woman in England to-day—skin-coloured stockings, short, straight, sleeveless frock, thin tortoiseshell bangle on upper arm, and mass of bobbed hair ; yellow, in this instance, and bleached by the wind and sun to every lovely shade. But her dialect was strictly Norfolk, the vowel-sounds running anyway, like the traffic in old days at Hyde Park-corner. For instance, the open vowels in " dyke " and " white " become " deek " and " wheet," while " channel " turns into " charnel."

She stood at the foot of a typical Norfolk windmill, the sails " open " and moving so slowly that at moments you could swear that they were still. Away across the marsh brown sails and white sails seemed to bear their boats over the surface of the land itself, so cunningly are the waterways hidden and intermingled. It is a landscape of four elements, reeds and water, windmills and willow trees, but they compose into a diversity of pictures, while " the waving sedges play with wind " as in the days when *The Taming of the Shrew* was written. Beautiful in sunlight ; perhaps most beautiful of all on a colourless day with pearl-white sky and water, when the multiplication of delicate greys are like the tones in a Japanese hand-coloured print.

Human beings are rarely seen except in boats ; a wherry passes with its graceful brown sail and a cargo of two moody middle-aged men, looking rather gloomily at a cake

and a bottle of whisky on a table between them. A larger and livelier company follow them down the channel ; they are all clad in what would seem to be bathing-dresses, but that garments even more exiguous in size and even more garish in colour hang drying on their rigging. They are young, but they are not pleasing ; their Cockney accents and their gramophone are strident, and they seem bent on demonstrating, male and female alike, what a discouraging object the unclothed human knee can present. They are not even very clean, but perhaps, after all, truth underlay the familiar nursery paradox, "Don't get playing with water, and get yourself all dirty." Perhaps, too, water as a background does tend to vulgarize the human race ; dismal pictures rise to the memory of the Lido, and even of the silver Thames.

But if this be a fact, it only applies to the "dressier" classes ; the marshmen, young and old, are a continual delight to the eye, whether rowing or sailing, punting or "quanting" their boats. The young ones are rather a disappointment on shore on Sundays, in their best clothes, copied from those of the more sportive of the tourists, but the old men never seem to discard their beautiful dark-blue guernseys, sea-boots, and sou'-wester hats. The most magnificent of them all, with the dreamy far-away eyes of the mystic, explained suddenly that he was really "a varmint-killer ; leastways a varmint-killing under-keeper in m' youth." It was said with superb pride, as if the office were that of one who takes precedence of an entire Cabinet.

The marsh children are friendly and charming, many of them with very fair hair, almost white ; in intimacy they address you alternately as "teacher" and "duck." Past and present are strangely mingled ; one very fine morning a glorious old village crony foretold wet. "I smell the rain, I smell un," he whispered, and there followed a prodigious snuffing of the breeze. His hearers were so touchingly impressed that he was moved to end triumphantly, "T'were forecasted on wireless this morning." This weather-prophet always wears one

trouser rolled up, as otherwise he cannot remember which is his right leg.

It is strange how quickly the eye becomes accustomed to the flatness of outline, and would resent any variation. But the inhabitants make the most of what they have not got, as well as of what they have. Beyond Swim Coat, a small tract of ground is raised about six feet above the surface of the water ; it is called Pleasure Hill. As we pass it, two tiny specks appear at an almost indiscoverable height, " The marsh harriers," the guide decrees serenely. Another invisible dot is pronounced to be a bittern ; to the short-sighted, life up here is a perpetual moral problem—what measure of insincerity does a laudable wish to please condone ? Perhaps the allusion to the bittern's beautiful copper-green legs is stretching a point, but it gives satisfaction. Ruffs and reeves have not yet been seen, even in the distance, but their hiding-places are pointed out, and in the museum at Norwich there is a fascinating row of their little stuffed bodies—enchancing, fantastic little creatures, they look like sheer magic, as if they might have strutted straight out of " L'Oiseau de Feu " ; each one is completely different from the rest, as apparently they defy the law of conformity to type and all the other tiresome rules of Nature. A true reeve (hen-bird) does not seem to have been secured, although one or two of the little exquisites bear the intriguing label, " Sex ? "

The North Sea lies only a few miles away, with its curly mud-coloured waves, and miles of sand-dunes and hard, firm sands, surely the most ideal walking-ground in the world, and utterly deserted, save for the incessant movement and cries of the sea-birds ; high in the air they swoop and swing, performing every perfect variation of vol-plane and side-slip, nose-dive and glide and spin. At intervals all along the coast, high above the windmills, rise the towers of the great Norfolk churches. In one of them there lies the beautiful carved stone slab of a 13th-century tomb : the Latin inscription, in Lombardic capitals, is much defaced, but it has been deciphered and translated : " Let Roesia by the mercy of Christ enjoy the light of heaven ;

let Caius enjoy the light of the sun if his heart is now emptied of ire." Did Caius do well to be angry ? At any rate, his wrath has been stilled now for 700 years ; and he lived in a beneficent country for emptying human hearts of ire and bringing them to peace.

WHINBERRIES

A stranger, walking in late summer through the hill-country along the Welsh marches between Montgomery and Salop or Radnor and Hereford, would probably guess that the groups of women and children scattered among the heather and busy about their baskets and cans were gathering blackberries. But a closer look would show that there are very few brambles on the moor where the pickers are engaged ; and an inquirer will be told that they are getting "wimbries"—or whinberries ; whinberries hereabouts, elsewhere bilberries, whortleberries, or hurts—the last giving a name to one of the heraldic tinctures, as well as to a wood in Surrey. The fruit is about the size of a currant, of a fine purple colour, with a blue bloom and rich crimson juice ; the flavour is pleasantly sub-acid and quite distinctive.

Though it is abundant in its particular habitats, the whinberry as a fruit is in general very little known. The plant, a low spreading bush with wiry stems and light green leaves, is a denizen of the hills and flourishes among heather about the 1,000ft. line. It is found both in north and south ; but it is along the Welsh border that its abundance makes it a matter of commerce and the harvesting of its berries an event in the calendar. On the wide moorlands which stretch from Church Stretton to Clun Forest, bracken and heather-clad, whose tops show here a line of straggling firs, here a group of barrows or a great ringed camp, the ripening of the whinberries counts with the hay, the grain, and the roots as part of the economy of the land. Like hopping, it is a family and a whole-time business ; by it the date of the school holidays is fixed. When picking begins little parties troop out very

early in the day from the farms and villages, covering long distances to the favourite gathering-grounds—places with names that may be Welsh or English or odd mixtures between the two—Cefns and Caers, the Leasty, the Goggin, the Three Gates or the Five Turnings ; and after the day's strenuous and tiring work at stripping the berries from the stems they trudge back at nightfall carrying almost incredible loads of fruit between them.

The baskets are collected by dealers in the villages, who pay the pickers—according to the passing of the season and the abundance or scarcity of the crop—from 1s. to 2d. a pound, and send the fruit away in bulk, large quantities going to Lancashire for use in dyeing. While the season continues the villagers are busy with the dispatch of daily cargoes ; the motor-vans, which have largely displaced the carriers' carts, are loaded with the fruit on its way to the station, which may be ten miles or more from the gathering-ground. The pickers have a long-established leave to range over the hills for their harvest ; sometimes there is a clash with the owners of the shooting rights, and loud lamentations if the few grouse which inhabit the moors should bring about a curtailment of the time allotted to the traditional industry. The whinberry season is a momentous matter to the cottage-folk. A mother and three or four children have been known to earn as much as £50 in a good season, a desirable provision for the winter's boots and clothes, counted on in the year's budget, or even used to stock a small farm. Thunderstorms and days of rain hardly stop the venturers ; a short crop, damaged by late frosts or a disastrous summer, is a loss severely felt in many a home. Of late years new troubles have appeared ; aliens now compete with the natives, and tribes of gypsies, camped on the hills, work the bushes early and late, stripping the fruit, not with careful fingers, but with metal combs, which fill the baskets with strigs and litter as well as with the berries. The dealers assist in the nefarious business by giving the same price for the rubbish and the clean-picked samples.

As the day closes in, and it becomes too dark to see the berries among the leaves, the little knots of pickers begin to trail down the hill towards home, tugging the loaded baskets, or, if the party be one of ambitious aims, piling their burdens on a little cart drawn by a donkey or a scrubby hill-pony. The dusk settles down on the vast bare heights, blotting out the lesser features and turning the whale-backed ridges and craggy tops—Corndon or the Bury Ditches or the Stiper Stones—to grey shades ranged edge over edge towards the fading afterglow. A group of belated gatherers, filing along a narrow track through the heather, dim figures visible rather by their movement than their forms, might be, for all signs of the present which they bear, a troop of the Stone Age, the people who made the barrows and the rings which crown the misty hills, who once gathered their whinberry harvest here as the valley-dwellers do to-day.

AUTUMN

THE FLAME OF AUTUMN

When summer has reduced all colour in the woods to its deepest tones, autumn inflames it once again to more than the splendour of spring. In that exquisite week of May when the light fell green through the beech-leaves as through a roof of glass, they were neither as vividly magnificent nor as varied as now in their last phase of copper and scarlet and gold. Cherry-trees blossoming as white as the April snow were not more splendidly distinguished than now with their crimson heads ; and between the contrasted splendours of spring and autumn lay a long interval of slowly tarnishing greenness, which has been ended by the blasts from the north.

Some trees achieve in autumn the brilliance which they miss in spring. The elms, so dusty and undistinguished in April and May, burn out their dross, now on the eve of November, in fires of gold. The English maple is in spring an undistinguished bush, unknown by name to many country-lovers. In October, though it may still be nameless, it unfailingly claims attention, where it turns a hollow lane into the mouth of a burning fiery furnace, or sometimes flames forth in crimson as conspicuous as the cherry-tree itself. It is part of the phantasmagoria of the time that trees wear no certain livery—are free, in their hour of dissolution and rejection, from the fixed ordinances that govern growth. Seldom do blossoms, such as those of the comfrey or the mountain pansy, assume different colours at will ; and their range of variation is small. Autumn leaves have a far wider licence. Blue is forbidden

to them, and the compulsion of change forbids them to remain green. But within these limits many species enjoy the amplest liberty. Crimson and scarlet are the colours most distinctive of the cherry-tree, both cultivated and wild ; but it also commands every shade of yellow, from the first gleam of lemon tinging its green, to the confines of orange and scarlet. Maples turn more often yellow than red ; elms and poplars multiply shades of yellow ; oaks light a lasting fire of slow combustion in which green leaves are gradually transfused to red till the last of them fall in December. All the splendours of October sunsets are caught in the leaves of the bramble, which, being partly evergreen, retain green shades also ; and the dogwood—another neglected shrub—backs the blaze of mingled reds and yellows with dark tones of slate and claret colour, approaching black. The one colour missing in the foliage is supplied by the sky on sunny days, when some swallow or house-martin still lingering in a hollow in the woods seems to float in a basin of serpentine brimmed with blue sea water.

Against this background of October foliage the hues of birds shine forth with a doubled intensity. Even the soft grey of the wood-pigeon becomes luminous as it skims the orange and crimson of the beechwoods ; and the plain black and white of the magpie are thrown into the sharpest contrast as it flaps across a coloured gulf in the woods. The birds and the leaves heighten each other, until the resulting picture is more vivid than almost any which spring can give. Only a kingfisher spinning, like a bolt of sapphire, over a buttercup field in May has the astonishing brilliance of the same bird speeding down the autumn stream against a screen of scarlet guelder-bushes and yellow willows. In misty winter fields—only a few weeks more will bring them—the heron watching by the waterside seems the very spirit of the fog, the incarnation of the greyness of the time. Now, when the sun flames on the wood behind him, and wakes the last touch of vivid green in the grass of the water-meadows, he seems cut from frosted silver.



FELLING AT GOODWOOD

The sense of opulence and lavishness in this autumn display is heightened by the absence of any utilitarian suggestion. We have learnt to regard the bright colours of flowers as an attraction to the insects which in Nature's economy must fertilize them, or else, as other teachers would have us believe, sometimes a warning to grazing animals to spare them. No such design is imputed to this equally wonderful display of the autumn leaves. Their brilliance is purely a by-product, an accident of a process of excretion ; and to minds a little weary of an interpretation of Nature as a laborious adaptation of means to ends, this comes with a sense of holiday. Even flowers lose some of their charm if we think of them too often as merely the preparation for fruit ; it is much as if we regarded children exclusively as the raw material of professional men. We can admire these bright hues of autumn without any implication of the subjection of Nature to toil. Nor, if we look a little below the surface, is there any ground for regret at this profusion of iridescent decay. The leaves are perishing, but the trees were never readier for life. Every leaf that falls is thrust off by a bud sealed against winter, and fat with the promise of spring. The fall of the leaves is a palpable rejuvenescence. While the leaves hung still green on the twig we saw them fretted with a summer's vicissitudes—their edges frayed by cold winds of May, their outline mutilated by summer caterpillars, and their surface hardened and discoloured by age and sun. When they fall, the scars of the year vanish, and the tree is reborn. Until all the leaves have fallen, and wind and rain have beaten them into mould, the earth looks dishevelled, and the trees naked and chilly. But each unleaved twig is the very picture of expectant fertility, with all its opportunities in hand, and all its adventures to live again.

RIDING THE RIDGEWAY

Bring Cobbett back to life and set him riding the roads again, and he would soon discover nuisances enough to make even a "feelosofer" blasphemous—turnpikes slippery and jarring to the feet of his mount, by-lanes reeking and soft from their fresh coat of tar, traffic moving at incredible speeds to the accompaniment of intolerable noises, stabling quarters converted into garages, and mounting-block supplanted by the petrol-pump.

Yet even to-day the rider, if he can only find the right one, may safely take the road. The simple hospitality of the country inn is still available. If no stall survives in this transformed inn-yard, some neighbouring farmer who prefers the ways of the old world to the new will sympathetically provide. It remains but to look out a large-scale map of Berkshire and Wiltshire, purchase a pair of saddle-bags, hire horses at Monk Sherborne or elsewhere, and strike up to the neighbourhood of Streatley or East Ilsley. There a side-lane, breaking north-westwards off the tarmac, and threading its way among the open grasslands of a dairy-farm, will presently plunge on a sudden into the width and silence of the Downs. Ahead, as far as eye can see, runs a broad ribbon of turf enclosed on either hand by barbed-wire fences. For mile after mile this green way switchbacks pleasantly close above the northern face of the undulating range, innocent of macadam (except for a brief interruption where it dips to cross the plain in the neighbourhood of Swindon), and so continues its primeval course—for it dates certainly from the Stone Age—until it reaches Avebury, a good two days' stage away.

It is the sort of track which in his dreams many a rider must have pictured ; and for beauty of setting it can have few equals. On the left hand stretch broad expanses of mellow stubble or plough-land where farm-teams plod or an occasional tractor creeps ticking. Farms nestle in the folds among their sheltering trees. Across the sky-line ahead a string of racehorses glides sedately in silent silhouette. On the right hand, from the down-foot several hundred feet below to the far-away horizon of the Cotswold Hills, lie the plains of Oxford and the Upper Thames, half-veiled in clouds, but here and there lit by rare sun-gleams to a misty emerald. There is history, too, as well as beauty, on the Ridgeway, though history of which we know no certain dates, no names of kings or battles. For at frequent intervals along its course rise the bare knolls which mark some unknown chieftain's grave or the straggling ramparts of an ancient camp. Soon after the mid-day halt (with corn for the horses at an obliging farm) occurs one such—known indifferently as Segsbury Camp or Letcombe Castle ; and later, on the fine bluff of Uffington, another still more famous. Here the dismounted rider will clamber down the slope, leading his horse behind him (for barbed wire provides no tether), and, looking sideways up, will see above him the chalk-white limbs of another Horse stretched in grotesque dismemberment across the shoulder of faded turf, where in the autumn purple gentians bloom. A few miles farther, from within a ring of beech trees, a low huddle of dark stones will catch the eye. It is an ancient tomb or dolmen, long since nicknamed Wayland's Cave, and so eerie a place under the shadow of the beeches that even the horses, standing abruptly still with a shiver, seem aware of something strange. So by nightfall to the Rose and Crown at Ashbury, a charming street of chalk-built cottages nestling close under the down.

If Cobbett were to pass this way to-day he would soon have had his fill of surprises—hearing from one farmer of a first-rate crop of wheat grown at £9 loss an acre ; from another of a village lout who, intent on Gunpowder Day

celebrations, set a squib to some barn-thatch, and so burnt down half a farm, and then escaped with no more punishment than a 5s. fine and a caution ! But, on the whole, the Ridgeway itself provides little opportunity for informing conversation. For few folk use it now—a shepherd or two driving flocks, some wagoners carting firewood, and, close to White Horse Hill, two nuns discreetly steering their much-enduring Morris among its crusted ruts. Towards the region of Avebury and Marlborough the landscape becomes, if anything, wilder and more desolate ; farms are rarer, and encounter with human beings appears less probable. By contrast even Savernake Forest—the next stage of the journey—seems almost populous. Cars patrol the Grand Avenue and penetrate, perhaps illicitly, even remoter glades. But the rider, by careful use of the map and some reliance on his bump of locality, may escape into narrow rides among the bracken, and fetching a compass to the east of Tottenham House strike into an old Roman road which, crossing the Canal and the Great Western Railway, brings up at Marten close under the southern range of the Downs. A green way of surprising beauty and seclusion here leads along the crest, past Inkpen Beacon and its gallows post, to Kingsclere and West Woodhay. There stabling fails ; but it is no far cry to Newbury ; and thence by way of Crookham Common and somewhat devious lanes a last cross-country stage can be planned yet farther eastwards. So in five days some 90 miles may be covered, two-thirds at least on grass ; and, so far as board and lodging are concerned, the mount fares as well as the rider. A certain spice, perhaps, is added to the venture by the ill-concealed astonishment which greets the equestrian traveller in these motor-ridden days.

GRAYLING FISHING

Now that October has painted great splashes of gold upon the elm trees and turned the perry pears in the orchards into pillars of flame, the grayling are at their best in the charming streams of North Herefordshire. Anglers who depend upon trout for their favourite recreation have put by the fly-rod and resigned themselves to hibernation, but we fortunate men of the Welsh marches have a fishing season that is prolonged into January, and on any mild day during the winter may know the thrill of a tight line and hear the music of the reel. Whether grayling are good for a trout stream is a point on which experts differ ; certainly if they are allowed to increase too fast the trout fishing suffers, but, as our Herefordshire streams show, it is quite possible for the two species to exist together in the same water, with the great advantage that, like Box and Cox, one fish comes on as the other goes off.

Compared with the trout, the grayling has a somewhat restricted distribution in England, and legend says that it is only to be found where it was introduced by the monks. This is almost certainly erroneous, for, though the ruins of monastic establishments are frequent in the neighbourhood of most grayling rivers, it may plausibly be argued that the grayling brought the monks rather than the monks the grayling. We have the authority of St. Ambrose that *flos piscium* was highly appreciated of old in clerical circles, and anyone who has eaten an October grayling freshly caught from Teme or Lugg or Arrow will approve the taste of the saint in food as much as he approved the taste of the flower of fishes.

In too many autumns adverse weather spoils the best of the grayling season, for when the water is much discoloured there is little to be done, and wet and misty days are not propitious. What the grayling really love is clear water and a bright sunny day after a touch of frost, and these are just the conditions that a kind Providence has supplied. A little more water would have been an advantage, but nothing is ever quite perfect in this world, and some loop-hole of excuse must be left for the weaker brethren whose creels are lighter than they should be. Things have been, at any rate, as nearly right as they ever are for those followers of Father Izaak who have been wielding the rod in the entrancing streams that wind through the hunting grounds of the Mortimers.

To see shreds of fleecy gossamer floating across a pale blue sky and starlings making clumsy attempts to imitate swallows as fly-catchers is to be sure of the kind of day that sharpens the appetite of the grayling, and the river-side is never more alluring than in these weeks of fading summer. In the orchards the cider apples are still mellowing on the trees, and are wonderful in their colouring after the fierce heat of August. They range through all tints from White Norman to Kingston Black, and in many places hang on the boughs as thickly as ropes of onions. Soon will begin the sound that always speaks of home to natives of the cider counties, when, in the misty evenings, the women and boys are gathering the fallen fruit out of the wet grass and flinging it into their zinc pails.

In its glow of autumn tints the strange jumble of hills and valleys through which the Lugg—"the bright river"—winds on its way to the battlefield of Mortimer's Cross looks even more beautiful than in primrose days, or when the woods are a mist of blue-bells. Unhappily the steep slopes bear many scars of war where an army of men and women has been cutting pit props, and the gaunt iron uprights of an aerial railway do not add to the picturesqueness of the scene ; but, after a short interval, Nature will cover up these brown ruins of ancient forest with a glory of foxgloves, and the river is unaffected and as full of

grayling as ever. That is the main point, for it is probable that no true angler contemplates the scenery when the fish are rising, and so to business.

Every one swears by his own particular fly, but it is generally admitted that grayling like a little bit of tinsel, and a fisherman will not go far wrong if he makes up his cast with a small blue and silver twist, a red tag and a willow fly. As reserves, a Wickham and a green insect are useful, and if none of these will catch it may confidently be asserted that the fault is not in the fly. Let the gut be as fine as possible and the flies small, and, now that the water is clear and low, do not disdain any piece of cover. The large grayling lurk in the tails of the swifter streams or where the current runs placidly over gravelly shallows, but the best of all are seldom taken with a fly. They require "gentle" persuasion, or a mysterious lure called a grasshopper, which resembles nothing in heaven or earth. The middle hours of the day are the best at this season of the year, and the writer remembers one October afternoon when the grayling of a certain Herefordshire stream were attacked by an epidemic of suicide. They simply would be caught, and the weight of his creel he dare not give, partly from shame, partly because no one would believe it. Such days, however, are not to be reckoned on, else would all the angling population of Great Britain migrate to Herefordshire in October, but, given suitable conditions, something of a bag is almost certain.

THE PLOUGH-TEAM

At six o'clock this morning, an hour before their accustomed time, the two old horses which work on Little Ease Farm start out from the yard with the master and the ploughman-carter—"Captain," the black, in the shafts of a cart which carries a plough, and "Duke," the brown, following behind. They pass every gate at which in the common course they might turn in for the morning's work; and unless their memories run back to certain autumn mornings of other years their honest heads must be puzzled when they find themselves going through the village street and along the high road into a far country.

Eight miles away they come to a farm and fields where many teams are gathered for the annual ploughing match; and after a rest they plough their half-acre as steadily and well as though they were in their own familiar Barn Croft or Rushy Plat. The task done by noon, the old harness cleaned and the brasses polished, they are groomed and fettled by the carter, their manes decorated with streamers and rosettes and their tucked-up tails plaited with straws and coloured braid, for the parade and judging of teams in the afternoon. At nightfall they are plodding home along the lane which leads to the stable, still in their trappings, and wearing at their ears the blue-and-white favours which mark the second prize for the best turn-out of tenant-farmers' teams. It was not for them to challenge the splendid creatures, pairs matched to an inch in height and a shade in colour, who paced before the judges with arched necks and proud action, the picked teams of the gentlemen farmers and big estates; but in their humble



IN THE CUCKMERE VALLEY, SUSSEX

class there were not many rivals to their workaday excellence.

They are untackled, and slouch off by themselves into the old stalls ; the gear is hoisted on to the racks, and they settle to their feed, champing a few extra oats to-night to the chaff of their ration. If any dreams come into their heads as they sleep standing in their close den, do they see anything of the long strange day, the unaccustomed roads and fields, the voices and faces of a new world ? To-morrow, untrimmed and roughly groomed, with dank manes and muddy fetlocks, they will be harrowing the six-acre, side by side in the traces, as they go side by side, year in year out, in the plough, the mower, the reaper, and, from long use and habit, when feeding out at grass. For twelve years, ever since they felt the first halter and learned to pull and back and to answer to the horse-language of the carter, they have worked unfailingly, patient, docile, unsparing of steady haulage as the heavy sod rolled over from the share, responsive to the signal-twitch of the rope reins, or, at the crack of the whip, heaving at the collar in desperate struggle to drag the timber-wain out of the woodland slough, or, sparks flying from the trampling hoofs, to take the overloaded wagon up the last pitch of the road to the mill. Their virtue is not only in exertion, equable and persistent, or momentary and violent ; they have their parts of knowledge and skill—the trick to keep track of the narrow furrow across the stubble, or between the ridges with the moulding-plough ; to swing round in compass at the furrow's end ; to back down the reaper, thrusting against the hampering breeching at the turn ; to wait motionless the hooking-on of the long chains when the great sticks of timber are to be trundled up the ways on to the tug, to throw their weight on the tackle in the stamp-and-go and flurry of the hoisting, to check instantly at the carter's word as the trunk comes up with a thud against the stops.

The reward for all the enduring service, the skilful strength, the quick obedience, is to rest a strained sinew on the tip of the shoe, to wait with dripping flanks and lowered

head in the driving shower, to plod homewards at nightfall—in December frost or the long overtime of harvest—to the rack and manger in the dark stall. The end is to be sold some day in the market to strange fields and new masters, to a carter, perhaps, who rules by rating and the butt of the whip ; last of all to come to the gun and the pit in the corner by the shaw, or the knacker's cart and the kennels. The noble beast in his prime, exulting in his strength, conscious of groomed coat and gay trappings, makes us forget the fated end ; but the old horse, showing his ribs, rough-coated, too ready to hang his head, slower at his work in spite of undiminished zeal, is a pathetic figure, too often a melancholy part in the general decay of farming, one with the broken hedges and the weed-smothered crops of a derelict industry. For every team which paraded at the ploughing-match there are many which never leave their ill-kept acres, never see a holiday from endless toil on barely sufficient provender. But the farm horse, be he a champion of the shows or only a beast of all work on a starved holding, is, in his endurance, faithfulness, generous use of strength, surely one of the greatest things which men have contrived in their handling of the brutes.

HERRING HARVEST

If the last holidaymaker has not gone home, he must feel that he is getting in the way of serious people. For Lowestoft and Yarmouth have settled down to their real work. It is the October herring season, which shifts the centre of gravity. Nothing perhaps could be more grave than the aspect of the crowd that take their pleasure on pier and "front" in August; but now, on other parts of the shore which then were quiet enough, neither men nor women have time to wonder whether they are enjoying themselves, all being concentrated on a definite purpose.

They have not even time to debate the relative importance of Lowestoft and Yarmouth as herring ports, on which, in more leisurely months, the partisans of both towns will hold forth with great ingenuity. The world at large talks of the "Yarmouth bloater," and thereby annoys Lowestoft, where it is an article of faith that the best Yarmouth bloaters are caught by Lowestoft boats. Why the same sea should favour one fishing fleet more than another may be a puzzle to the stranger, but is none to Lowestoft. Yet Yarmouth might agree with its neighbour on their common superiority to Scotch fishers of the herring.

Agreement will, however, be silent at the moment. Scotland has invaded East Anglia, and "Wha daur meddle with me?" The streets are full of buxom girls from places away North with names Suffolk people cannot pronounce. Though the invaders talk in strange accents, they make themselves understood by the shopkeepers, and when

they leave in a few weeks' time they will carry with them big bundles of strange purchases. It is not the fisherman alone who reaps a harvest in October.

They are cheerful souls, these girls. Their laugh, when they do laugh, is louder than the summer visitor's. Where he wandered not so long since, with an anxious eye on his trailing offspring, they bend industriously over their work. If it is not pretty work, they have pretty hands in the doing. As the knives turn and twist the herrings disappear in a flash, ready for the next preservative operation that fits them for their long, packed journey to the north, east, and south of Europe. Sometimes the work is continued far into the night, and then the flares cast about the benches wonderful lights and shadows that play hide-and-seek among fish-scales and knives, over human countenances and around the huge pyramids of boxes.

The roar of the sea, often a very wild sea, is the accompaniment of this fast and skilful labour. Now and then comes matter for talk that stills any tendency to laughter. A fisherman has been washed overboard and drowned, or a boat is lost. Such accidents—not to speak of badly cut fingers, which, for all their dexterity, the girls cannot always avoid—are in the day's work.

Other women are caring for the nets. The reddish brown of the nets combines with the sails and boats' rust to give the place its predominant tone. The harbour is packed with boats ; so many boats, native and foreign, that it is hard to see how they can ever be disentangled. Their constant coming and going proves that the thing can be done, and a doubt will occur whether, when everything is seen, the London policeman has not a rival in smoothing out bundles of traffic. As for that last holidaymaker—if indeed he has dared to stay—he has resolutely decided by this time that his importance in the herring scheme can be compared only to that of a mouse in the rush of Piccadilly. Fate has many and various ways of making a man feel small, but has devised few more effective than setting him down, an idler, amid the flurry of boats that catch herrings, women who disembowel herrings, men who pack

herrings, and auctioneers who, with tremendous voices and very technical phraseology, sell herrings.

The humiliated person may afterwards, at a safe distance, discourse of "crans" and what not. But, unless he be bolder than becomes a man and have retired as far as Timbuctoo, he will not dogmatize on the different methods of curing herrings for different tastes and markets. Packing in ice, kippering, and bloatering (or whatever they call the last process) are the mere A B C of this learning. To smoke a herring to this, that, or the other degree of nicety demands a deep and subtle knowledge such as goes to the editing of Æschylus. There are secrets which fathers hand down to their sons, and which the sons will never reveal. Possibly it is on these secrets that Lowestoft founds its mysterious boast as to the provenance of the best Yarmouth bloaters.

A GOOD DOG

Pandora is a compact little Labrador. During the lazy months her figure is somewhat rounded, but in the shooting season ripples of muscles stand out like watered silk. An expert might say her eyes were too dark, her ears a trifle big, he might object to a spot of white on her chest. Let it be so. Eastern wisdom says, "Musk is not that which bears the name of musk, but that which has the scent of musk"; we put it less picturesquely, "Handsome is as handsome does." When suitably spoken to, Pandora replies with a toss of her head, a trick inherited from a mother of whom I will tell a story. After winning at field trials she was—I must confess it—sold for money and found a happy home. Two years later we went to see her and her black puppies. Recognition, delight we expected, but that was not enough. When the visit ended she jumped into her former mistress's car and, forgetful of her family, refused to move till, protesting with all the strength of her four paws, she had to be dragged out. It was a saddened party that drove away, in our hearts the determination "Never again!"

Pandora is a "good" dog, by which I mean much the same as when I speak of a good child; for many dogs do seem to be able to choose which of two opposite courses of action, dictated respectively by conscience and instinct, they will follow. In the "bad" dog (or child) instinct is the dominant influence, and it matters little whether you call it by the old-fashioned name "original sin" or prefer the modern term "self-expression."

So dogs have "free will"? The late Professor Ray Lankester once commented on the proposition: "Can a

fish avoid biting if you give him the right stimulus under the right conditions?" The proper reply to that, he wrote, is by another question. "Can a fish, or a man, or a fly (or a dog) avoid any course of action if you give him the right stimulus under the right conditions?" Unless by "right" is meant "wrong," the inquiry is nonsensical. The existence of inhibitory and accumulative mechanisms in the nervous structure of lower as well as higher animals, by which the action of the simple, direct reflex mechanisms is arrested or modified, is well known. There is no justification for introducing the words "voluntary" or "choice" or the conception of will.

But let me return to Pandora. She is a "shooting man's dog." She will push out a rabbit and then see it away and shot without a move. But when I say she requires no handling and no lead, a Field Trial purist might possibly protest. I have a good stand. Over the dark belt of firs against the blue sky pheasants come streaming. Pandora trembling beside me intently watches each one and gets very anxious. "Such a lot to pick up," she tells me. Some lie in the open. One in a patch of red bracken far behind, one in a hedge, another in the adjoining cover. One has towered and fallen two fields away. "Can I remember them all?" Ah, a cock, the sun gleaming on the copper of his breast, hit too far behind, slopes down, lies a moment, then picks himself up and begins running as cock pheasants can run. More birds come. I look round. Pandora has departed like a shadow. Minutes go by and the drive is over. No Pandora! A friend ventures on some well-meant words of sympathy. Presently a black dog pushes through a hole in a distant hedge. Here she comes, the cock, with neck outstretched, in her mouth. "Forgive me," she says with eyes and tail, "You saw how it was. That bird would have been lost." I call her a bad dog—but do I mean it?

A wood pigeon once crashed down among some high trees in a wood and Pandora was sent for it. She found some feathers and as she was investigating them up from

under her very nose jumped a rabbit which she watched away with a curious expression of puzzlement. What was in her mind? The pigeon had turned into a rabbit? Self-questionings—"Ought I to have caught that rabbit?" Anyhow, she would not hunt more for the pigeon, which, as a matter of fact, was securely hung up on a high branch.

I suppose good dogs sometimes incur the dislike of their more ordinary, sinful kennel companions. Once Pandora, having been given two biscuits for her meal and feeling one was "quite sufficient, thank you," took the other biscuit and put it back in the sack in the other room from which it had been taken. I wondered what the hungry spaniels who "had not had nearly enough" thought of this procedure. Here I imagine a reader muttering, "One best dog in the world and everybody has got it." So I feel bound to tell a story entirely to Pandora's discredit. She was being handled by her mistress at some field trials, and it happened that the gun behind whom she was "down" was completely "off colour." Pheasant after pheasant went away untouched—birds that ought to have come down, as Pandora knew. She did not whine—that is a thing she has never done—but as the last few birds were missed she groaned, not only in spirit, but aloud. The "gun" looked round at the dog and laughed, and that, I think, spoke better for him than it did for Pandora. One last story, about which I shall venture on no explanation whatever. Pandora, with a litter of pups about two months old, was in a separate kennel, the door of which on a fine summer's morning was left open to the garden. Her mistress passing by heard her growling and peeped in. Surrounded by an excited group of her children, she was lying with a half-grown and very lively young pheasant between her paws, which, being rescued, ran away unhurt into the shrubbery.

THE HUNTER'S MOON

Dusk falls on the October woods with a tingle in the crisper air and a stir of life that belies the decadence of the season. Before the large moon yet peers from the east over the park chestnut-trees, there rises from among them that deep and hollow bark with which the fallow bucks, at other times self-effacing, claim for a season the lordship of the thicket. Autumn for the fallow deer is the season of courtship ; for them the scent of falling leaves and decaying fungi must have the same associations of emulous delight with which the breath of may-bloom and bluebells heightens the midnight rapture of the nightingale.

It is a strange and heartening music when, as happens on many autumn nights, the belling of the fallow bucks is answered by the hooting of the wood owl. The brown owl's full-voiced chant revives as the leaves begin to fall ; it swells clearer and clearer throughout autumn, as the bared trunks yield a more resonant echo. In the roofed aisles of the woodland sanctuary the music gains mellow volume like the peals of the organ in a cathedral. The autumn music of most other birds is an imperfect anticipation of their song in spring. They sing because the keener air, and their vigour reviving after the moult, suggest to them the eagerness of the nesting season. But the wood owl sings more freely on October nights than in those chilly weeks of early spring when it begins its nesting. The man-faced bird's " Tu-whit, tu-whoo " has forced its way into literature by its familiar reiteration ; and yet the traditional syllabic version is a disparagement of its sweet October call. " Tu-whit " is the well-known cry

uttered from a perch among the garden trees, of which to modern ears "Ko-wick" is an exacter rendering. This is the note of the owl idle or expectant ; and sometimes it is followed by a low "too-hoo." But in the call made afloat on the wing there is no fretful initial click or catch, only a modulation of the sweet and hollow wood notes.

The season and the occasion of the brown owl's most heartening cries suggest that they are not a prelude of mating fervour, but an expression of less specialized vitality. Owl cries to owl in these nights of the hunter's moon for joy of active life, as they course the glades in new bloom of silent feathers. Owls, and perhaps most other birds, usually mate for life ; and these are birds so old, or with such grey heads revolving circumspect on young shoulders, that they may ignore the annual celebration of monogamous joys and prefer to hymn their autumn hunting. It is a tortured and improbable explanation that they cry aloud to paralyse their prey with fear and make an easy capture. Brown owls feed mostly on small birds, and they hunt when other birds are at roost, snatching a black-bird or a greenfinch from some exposed perch among trees or bushes. The victim is motionless already, and does not need to be checked for death, like a rabbit coursed by a weasel.

Thickets and hedges abound on autumn nights with busy mice. But the white screech-owl, which prefers mice to birds, as a rule does not attempt to snatch them from their thorny fastnesses ; it hunts field mice in the lanes and meadows. Few birds like winding a way through thorny bushes, which may spoil their flight feathers by unhooking the small clasps that keep their vanes compact. Inside the bramble-patch or the lissom thicket of wild clematis the night mice can twitch and gnaw in safety, while the night resounds with mellow hooting or the rarer shriek of the Dutchman's "death-bird." Not all dormice have yet gone to sleep on these October nights ; and the dormouse, snail-like by day, is after dark as nimble as a kitten. We shall hardly see him as he climbs the hazel stumps with his prehensile tail crooked beneath him

like a seahorse, or rustles over the fallen leaves in the hedge-bottom ; but if we care to search the ditch by day we shall find his fresh nutshells smoothly opened by a round hole just edging the husk's scar, as if its roughness had given his teeth purchase. Through so small a hole the dormouse gnaws out all the nut's kernel ; and finer still is the fret-work of the slender woodmouse. Pick over the dense and varied seed-heaps with which, night by night, it fills old birds' nests, or which it lodges in nest-like clusters among the clematis bines ; the delicacy of its perforation is hardly credible. A sloe-stone is breached by a smooth hole not at the side, in dormouse fashion, but at the apex ; and equally precise and defined is the orifice in far smaller seeds, down to the whitebeam kernel and the minute plumed grains of the clematis. The woodmouse can make and feed through a hole hardly larger than the prick of a darning-needle ; it drills less like a mouse than an insect.

Autumn nights are fanned by moths' wings, like nights of June. October is the time chosen for emergence by the mottled umber moth, of which the hooped reddish caterpillar, with buff-striped sides, was abundant in early summer. These moths swarm sometimes among the crimsoned beech woods, and go flying before the gusts of wind and rain. Their courtship is unusual, for the female is completely wingless. She looks like some misshapen beetle-grub or spider ; and the male umber, whose wings are weak though ample, must seek her among the October storms, from which Nature has protected her by denying her all power of gadding.

SPIDERS' SNARES

The gossamers of autumn mornings are not the growth of one misty night, like the mushrooms in the pastures ; the webs that were invisible in dry air are revealed by the condensing dew. Search the sprays of the box hedges on dry September days, and the fine mats are there still, with a minute spider sheltering beneath them ; but the tracery is almost impalpable until the chill of the autumn nights has threaded it with innumerable beads and trans-figured its slight texture. Gossamer webs are far smaller than the geometrical snares of the garden spider, but are woven more intricately. They are framed to catch the smallest motes of life that can slip through the mesh of *Epeira's* Euclidean figures. The last days of summer provide the fullest display of the varied stratagems of web-weaving spiders ; for while the dew betrays the slighter toils, *Epeira's* screens are now flung most widely, and the hedge-banks are still full of *Agelæna's* grey funnel-like lairs.

Many spiders do not weave webs ; this art, characteristic of the more familiar species, is a development of the primary gift of spinning silk for the protection of eggs and young. Possibly the power of descending and ascending by a spun thread came even earlier ; certain caterpillars can escape danger, and return to their perch, by the same means, though no adult moth or butterfly is a silk-spinner. But spiders which make no use of this gift in other ways still use it for wrapping their eggs. Some carry their live parcel about with them, attaching it in various ways to their body ; others bind it among leaves or

grasses, like the cocoon of a silk-weaving caterpillar. Open this tough yellowish globe, and there is the clot of lucid eggs, or a swarm of young spiders not yet scattered. Without destroying the nest we can distinguish it by the roundness of its core or kernel, whereas moths' cocoons are oval. Among the peculiarities of spiders is their capacity to fast, and even after the minute glossy spiders have left their nest we sometimes find them perched on some paling in a bunched swarm, apparently waiting until their next moult leaves them larger and more fit to travel.

The garden spider, with its cross of white spots, is not confined to gardens; its webs are common among autumn herbage in copses and larch-woods, and can be seen even in London park shrubberies. *Epeira* and her relatives construct the familiar concentric webs, which are actually not concentric but spiral. The web is held in place by long tough threads, much like the guy-ropes of a bell tent, except that they are of different lengths, as the nearest safe attachment may determine. These guy-ropes are so strong and elastic that it needs some force to break them. Between these guys *Epeira* stretches the spokes of her wheel, and winds her spiral about them. Somewhere in shelter she spins a lair, with a thread by which she runs to the web when its vibration signals a capture. Once more her spinnerets may aid her, when some great bumble-bee, several times her own weight, almost bursts her meshes. She leaps upon him, and half numbing him by a bite or two, withdraws a little and spins him quickly into a grey shroud, then feasts on him at leisure.

House spiders have no geometric mind, and less structural skill. The domestic cobweb is a dense mat like a stouter gossamer web, with a tunnel in which the spider sits and waits for bluebottles, like her fellow—*Agelæna* of the hedgebanks. Deep in this grey den she spins her nest-ball. The dense sheets of both the house spider and the hedge spider are usually spread horizontally, but the garden spider's are at a slant approaching the perpendicular. In this, as in the economy of her geometrical

tracery, she has advanced beyond them, and is at the head of all cobweb-spinners in these islands.

Spiders have put their silk to one more purpose, and that the strangest—to give them the power of flight. On the same fine autumn days when misty morning reveals the dew-silvered gossamers the blue haze of noonday is often full of white curled threads drifting before a warm light air. These are the vehicles on which the small spiders which we have seen in their nests, or expectantly patient, have at length sought new hunting grounds for their maturity. Sometimes the passenger has left the barque—perhaps dropping by another thread when the aircraft for a moment touched a hedge or tree-top. Often, after a walk through this silk-lined air, we find one or two small glossy spiders exploring us. The empty threads grow whiter as they tangle and retangle, until, with the dying of the breeze and the condensation upon them of sunset moisture, they fall to earth again.

Young spiders of many kinds make this airy voyage, and in many months. Most choose a fine day in September because, having been hatched in summer, they are ready now to scatter in these late days when *Epeira* has waxed fattest. But the swarming of young spiders is as conspicuous on a few mild, bright mornings throughout the winter, even after a night of frost. Called out from their lairs in the grass-roots by the pretence of spring, they let stream their threads from the blade-tips until the field, in the beams of the low sun, ripples with silken light. Their frail bodies seem little able to endure winter's cold either in the old lairs or the new, but at last, from beneath leaf or grass, or from the chinks of trees, they emerge to grow lusty in spring.

BLACKBERRYING

Blackberrying is usually considered an occupation fit only for nursemaids and children ; but, taken seriously, it is a sport not beneath the notice of grown men and outdoor women. If it cannot rank with shooting, nor with fishing, it partakes of the joys of both ; and on days when neither of these is to be had, blackberrying is not to be despised.

The outfit is simple and inexpensive. It consists, for men, of :—Very old, rough coats, one in number ; very stout breeches, ditto ; gaiters, one pair ; shooting-boots, ditto ; long, crooked sticks, one in number ; baskets, ditto ; and tobacco (to frighten the flies away) unlimited. On the outfit for women (except the stick and the basket) I do not presume to advise ; but I strongly recommend the gaiters and boots (shoes and stockings only mean agony before the day is out) ; and gloves are worse than useless. The stoutest driving-gloves get torn to ribbons ; and bare finger-tips are essential to the nice and necessary distinction between ripe, unripe, and squidgy.

So out we set in the sunshine and the brisk autumn breeze. Very soon we leave the road, though there are blackberries in the hedges by the thousand. We are not out to get mere blackberries. The order is what the shop-people would call table-fruit only, which is as much as to say “cocks only,” or “nothing under three-quarters of a pound.” Our way is by wild lanes, through coppices, along the banks of streams, anywhere that the brambles have had room and leisure to grow as they please. The search is almost as exciting as a walk after partridges, and more so than fishing a stream. For blackberries are uncertain in

their habits. Where they rioted one year, there will be none this year. You never can tell where it is that you will come upon your heart's desire. But when you find it ; when you get in the middle of them !

In their red and black and green, the sprays are so beautiful in the sunshine that, early in the day, you feel eager to look and all but loth to pick. That mood lasts but a short time. The biggest blackberry is always at the tip of the spray ; and the finest spray is always far out of reach. The lust of the hunter seizes on you. The prey is guarded by a zareba of nettles, thistles, blackthorn, and other offensive growths ; and behind them all lurk its own terrible weapons. There is a ditch at your feet. To get the blackberries you must stand on the very edge of the ditch, throw yourself forward against the rampart of brambles, reach up with the stick, and still have a hand free and subtle to pick delicately and hold lightly the fragile fruit. And when you have picked, you have to get upright again, without accident. It is not easy ; it is not child's play. And it is, on the whole, less maddening to miss a bird or feel a fish break your line than to see your basket of blackberries upset.

There are intervals for rest, and quiet strolls from place to place, during which you may revel in the lights and shadows, the curves of the hills, and the swiftly mellowing colours of the early autumn. From shoulder to finger-tip you are stuck with thorns, excoriated, and bruised ; your basket is mighty heavy (with the strictest selection, I have picked between six and seven pounds in a few hours), and your back is aching. But the sight of more fine blackberries sets you to't again ; until you can no more, and go home happy, with a noble desire for tea—for tea with blackberries, and sugar, and heaps of Devonshire cream.

THE PHEASANT

How many men who shoot in October have heard of Colonel George Hanger ? He is unread, he lacks his *vates sacer* ; you will not find him among the new editions.

Yet he published his book, "To All Sportsmen, and Particularly to Farmers and Gamekeepers," in the same year, 1814, in which Peter Hawker, just gazetted out of the Army on account of wounds received at Talavera, gave the world his "Instructions to Young Sportsmen in the Art of Shooting" : and it was he who first wrote detailed advice as to the preservation of pheasants. It is true that some of his suggested methods have a rather full military flavour ; for instance, he recommends that, in order to be sure of keeping poachers out of your wood, you should mount a six-pounder cannon on the top of your house, and fire a few rounds of glass marbles and perforated clay balls into the wood by night, two or three times a week.

The perforated ball, he says, would "make a most terrible whizzing noise, and, together with the marbles buzzing about a fellow's ears, would make him think that the very devil was in the wood." This is a little old-fashioned, but otherwise the Colonel has plenty of advice which would suit gamekeepers to-day. It is he who first prescribes the proper proportions, five hens to a cock, for the laying-pens ; and as to diet for the young birds, the present writer was told by a friend, as a new and valuable "tip," that young pheasants should be given green onion-tops. Hanger printed the "tip" in the year before Waterloo.

But who, before Hanger, wrote anything practical about breeding pheasants ? The " Sportsman's Dictionary," which went into a fourth edition in 1792, has nothing to say ; and yet, in 1790, Pye, the Laureate, wrote a poem, " Amusement," in which he pours scorn on the effeminacy of the day, and writes of " the winged tribe " which

by care domestic bred,
Watch'd with attention, with attention fed,
Where'er the sportsman treads in clouds arise,
Prevent his wish, and sate his dazzled eyes.

That can only mean pheasants ; and yet Hawker, greatest of authorities on shooting, writes of pheasants twenty years later as if he had never heard of any but wild birds. It is a curious lacuna in the history of shooting, and it would be interesting if it could be filled, for with the introduction of the system of rearing pheasants by hand we come to the beginnings of pheasant-shooting as it is understood to-day ; and to the difference too, between the pheasant-shooting of October and the modern, carefully planned covert shoots of November and later in the season.

Our great-grandfathers, with Hawker and Hanger, shot their pheasants—sometimes other people's—anywhere and anyhow ; and, except that we are more careful as to our neighbours' boundaries, that is the way in which pheasants are shot in October to-day. The pheasant season opens, of course, on the First, but not in the same way in which the grouse season opens on the Twelfth of August, or partridge shooting begins on the First of September.

The date is a convenience rather than an occasion ; we may shoot if we please, though probably we shall not ; and if we do, it will be hardly so much for the sake of sport as frankly for the pot. True, the gamekeeper welcomes the legal date, for he can then have an honest shot at the hardy old cock of last season, who likes to get some of the young fellows putting on their new feathers to follow him away from the coverts to the blackberries and other delicacies of distant hedges.

But, generally speaking, we are all agreed that the young cock pheasant of early October is an immature, callow



SILVER BIRCHES

creature, more likely to run away from the gun, or, indeed, towards it, than to fly as cock pheasants should. At the end of September he is still moulting, and he will not get the splendid blues and scarlets and bronzes of his full plumage, much less the strength that goes with firm wing-muscles and a long tail, until November, when, moreover, frost and wind will clear the leaves from the trees so that it is easier to see to shoot him.

And there is another reason for waiting. Pheasants can be expensive birds. Wild pheasants, it is true, cost little to keep ; a stack of barley-rakings is enough to attract them, morning after morning, to the same clearing in the wood. But pheasants that have been reared under domestic hens cost money, both to buy as eggs and to feed as chicks ; and that being so, it is waste to bring them to an end before they have filled their purpose, which is to give the gun a sporting chance of hitting them and themselves a sporting chance of escape.

Later in the year, hurled down a thrashing November gale, it may be, or rising high over January snow-fields, the bird which to-day bustles ignobly from the hazel hedgerow will swing over a line of guns to test the quickest hand and the straightest eye. If he is to justify his keep, he must fly far and fast ; otherwise, you might with almost as much satisfaction add him to the bag from the poulterer's window.

When we go pheasant-shooting in October, then, we are after wild birds : we shall leave the main stock of the covert till a later day. And beating round the "outsides"—the coppices, the hedgerows, and the rough fields that lie away from the central coverts—can be as pleasant a day's shooting as any man need look for with a gun and a dog. It is the sunshine that makes the day. Summer is surely not over when we can still watch the small copper and the red admiral butterflies balancing themselves on the wild scabious ; or when the harebells still hang fresh side by side with the toadflax and the campion.

But autumn is here, with the acorns slipping from their cups, and the great splashes of yellow in the crowns of

the elms, like light poured through a church window ; with the birches fluttering half-bare, and the bryony red and orange, and traveller's joy turned to old man's beard in the roof of the hedge. Or we glance at the blackberry bushes, and have to look closely to pick fruit that is not over-ripe ; or, as we stoop, we get the scent of crushed crab-apple from the path trodden under the fence. These belong to October, and so, too, does that clatter of wings which comes from the gorse-clump where a moment or two before we heard a whimper from the spaniel.

Out he flusters, in his early bravery of bronzes and greens, one of the young cocks of a brood hatched by his wild mother in that boundary hedgerow, it may be ; and as he gets to a fair distance from the gun, down he crashes into the brambles. He is the first of the day, and he will be followed by others, young and ancient, to make a bag which adds an entry to the game-book none the less happy in that it belongs to the old fashions.

WOODING

November is the month when the wood sales take place, and where chestnut plantations abound auctioneers are giving notice of sales of underwood. Underwood consists of stubs or roots which bear from three to five stout poles varying from four inches to eight inches in diameter. They are bought as they stand by the acre or "cant" for fencing and hurdle-making, and an acre or cant sometimes fetches £20 or more.

For some time past the woodreeve has been busy laying out and marking the cants. He is an important man in the neighbourhood, and in old days would have been even more important. The name "reeve" (master), which is common in Chaucer, has fittingly survived in what is, perhaps, the oldest craft in the country.

In the condition that requires "the wood to be cut down in a fair and workmanlike manner no person to cut withes except in his own lot and all maiden chestnut and ash plants to be cut three inches from the ground," lies almost the whole art of wooding. To find out what a fair and workmanlike manner means, one has only to watch the woodreeve at work. His tools are a 5lb. falling axe and a billhook; both ground to an edge so fine that a thumb rubbed ever so lightly on it will cling to the edge.

When he cuts down a pole he stands in one place and swings his axe first right-handed and then left-handed. To do this is the mark of the expert, and when he has felled the pole, cutting as close to the stub as possible, he leaves the stub clean and flat as if it had been cut with a

saw. He falls all the poles one way, and when he has cut a certain number he starts clearing up. He has a stout forked stake fixed in the ground, from three feet to four feet high, and in this fork he rests the butt-end of a felled pole. He is then able to trim off the sidegrowths. This done, he takes the end of the pole in one hand and with sharp strokes of his billhook shears off the head, leaving a clean pole with the butt lodged in the fork of the stake. However thick the end of the pole is he cuts with the billhook, so that the sheared end looks as though the cut had been made with one stroke. This he does by working backwards with each stroke of the bill, each second stroke clearing the wood of the stroke in front of it. The pole thus cleaned is thrown in one place, and each succeeding pole is stacked with it, the butts all pointing the same way. The trimmings and tops are then arranged in line to one side of his clearance and these stacked tops gradually form a long line of brush which is known as "ringe-wood" and will eventually be made up into faggots. He will then start to fall, or fell, another batch of poles.

If a cant is bordering on a hedge, enough light underwood must be left to allow of repairing the hedge by layering, that is, bending over and intertwining with upright stakes.

Withes are long slender hazel shoots or saplings which are used for tying faggots. The woodman puts his foot on the thick end of the shoot or withe, grasps it with his right hand some two feet or so from the end and twists it round. If this is properly done, the shoot does not break, but twists itself like a rope, and after a turn or two he bends his hand and lets the withe double on itself, when, owing to the thick end being held fast by his foot, it writhes, as it were, and forms a loop. With further twisting the remainder of the withe is made ropey and is ready for binding a faggot. Withes are also made easily from the wayfarer tree.

Maiden chestnut and ash plants, that is, young plants of a year's growth and having only a single stem, are cut off with the billhook three inches from the ground. This will

make them sprout to two or three growths in the following year. Chestnut and ash do not die when cut, as larch and some other trees do, but sprout again and are fit for poles after about ten or twelve years' growth. When all the poles in the cant have been felled, those which are too crooked to be used for fencing or hurdles and abnormally heavy butts are sawn into lengths and stacked in "cords" for firewood. A correct cord of wood is eight feet long by four feet wide by four feet high. The ringewood is tied into faggots in the spring and early summer and stacked close to a wood road or "wentway" for carting.

If the poles are to be sawn, split, sharpened, and tied into bundles *in situ* ready for fencing, the woodman will fix up a kind of horse in which his pole can be jambed, and with his drawshave he will take off the skin or bark. He then uses a dowell-axe, or socket-axe, which is a straight blade with a socket at one end, into which a handle is fixed. Having given this a start into the thicker end of the wood with an improvised mallet, he prises the two halves apart, splitting the pole straight down the heart.

A first-rate woodman is proud of his craft and is almost invariably a good fellow. Foxes will play by him while he is at work, rabbits take no heed of his presence, stoats will run out without fear of him, and even the jay will forbear to squark; for they all know the music of the axe and that, when a man is swinging an axe, there is no fear of his carrying a gun.

NOVEMBER PARTRIDGES

“It’s closing itself; it generally does,” an old Tweed fisherman remarked one late November evening, gazing at the darkening river, and hoping in vain for the “back end” salmon which should fitly finish the season. And the same is true of the season of partridge shooting. When the roots are pitted there is no more cover into which the keeper with his line of beaters can drive the coveys before sending them over the fence to the waiting guns. The days of the fields and the hedgerows are over, and the thoughts of the country house shooting parties turn to the woods.

But how pleasant the day may be before the season closes! These morning hours of late autumn, with the elms and the larches yellow under a cloudless sky—are there any others with a more buoyant pulse of wind and sun? Hope begins with the light. An air blows in at a bedroom window from dew on the lawn; the garden smells of frost, of oak leaves, of wet soil under a southern wall. And we are to be out after breakfast on stubbles and grass and plough, waiting for the keeper’s distant whistle that means coveys speeding forward to the hedge of hawthorn or the belt of spruce. What could a shooting morning promise more?

Memory goes back to other such mornings, each with its different outlook. Which would you choose, if you could be back again? An hour of Hampshire, would it be—with the chalk stream under the stony hill, and the junipers studding the turf, and the reek of turnips down wind from the fence? Or Salisbury Plain and its long white roads, and hares cantering over the skyline—an acre of hares,

perhaps, such as Cobbett saw at Netheravon and wrote of in "Rural Rides"? Better than Salisbury Plain the Sussex Weald, with the downs twenty miles away to the sea; or one of those big flinty fields of Surrey, where you can drive partridges over strips of pine; or that strange and fascinating breckland of the Eastern Counties, where partridges are the best crop the ground grows, and where you may shut your eyes and people the desert horizon with bustards dead and vanished from England a century since. It is the breckland we are nearest to to-day; in Norfolk, and on a morning that seems to belong typically to the county, with a rain-washed sky blue above spruces and elms, and blue wet ruts along the cart-tracks, and tinkling water in hidden ditches, and broad fields shining with flints and mangold-wurzels. And with fields, too, that wear an aspect new to some of us, untidy spaces of broken soil and littered green and yellow leaves, and outside the field gate piled at the roadside a heap of whitey-brown roots crusted with mud, which—oddly enough—have been topped but not tailed. It is the new crop, beet; and the sugar, it seems, goes to the very tips of the roots—a new accompaniment, these unsightly saccharines, of partridge-driving.

We take our places for the first drive. The beaters have walked in three or four fields of stubble and fallow, pushing before them any coveys they have found into the roots which we can see through the fence in front of us. They are now lining the far hedge, and silence lies over the field. It is much to the waiting shooter to hear the coveys get up before they come to the fence, for if he is a judge of distance he knows what time he has got; and we listen intently in a quiet, broken by the bark of a jay jinking from an oak, and the meditative carols of answering robins. A wren, beak and tail sharply cocked, interpolates his fiery little jet of song; and from a mile or more away raps out another sound of Norfolk mornings. "Pat—pot"—the guns on the next manor are earlier to work than we.

Suddenly we pick out another sound. A familiar creaking in mid-field is followed by the keeper's whistle—a second whistle. Two coveys have risen and are on their way—

our way ? No. A scattered group of grey specks is mounting to clear the trees on the right of the line ; we hear the quick reports of the guns, but we dare not do more than glance aside ; there may be a whistle sounding for us too. The second covey, we realize, has come over the middle of the line, and as they flee behind it two grey balls curve down to the stubble floor, bounce and are still. Some one has scored a pretty right and left. Our neighbour to the right is less lucky, but a minute later drops a crossing single bird neatly into the hedge. Another covey breaks over the right, and the beaters are out of the field.

Now comes a different task. Five of the guns go forward to line a distant fence ; two remain on the right and left of the beaters, who are to walk some big fields with the right flank forward swinging round at right angles to the fence lined by the guns. It is an interesting if not very exacting job, for we are really driving pheasants rather than partridges, and the two guns with the beaters are to take any birds that break back. But the attraction is to watch the birds we flush. We cover a wide front, with the beaters dragging lengths of rope between them over the heads of the roots and seeds, and as we flush pheasant after pheasant we see them fly steadily forward, high or low, but always, as they catch sight of the guns, mounting suddenly higher—a disconcerting flight which enables more than one of them to reach their chosen covert behind the line.

That, too, is a typical drive, but it is not the best. We get that later in the day, from a large field of roots into which partridges have been put to join the pheasants already there. Does that not make for an exhilarating contrast of pace and angle and the purpose of the bird ? For the pheasant is faster than the partridge, as you can tell if you see the two on the wing together ; but he is the easier, driven like this. He may swing and curl, but it is on a wide arc. The partridge is a bird incalculable. He is surprised to find you there, he surprises you when you try to find him. To the left, to the right, swerving up, across, back where he came from, and screaming and chattering at you as he alters his mind and perhaps succeeds



TROUT-FISHING NEAR THE TISSINGTON SPIRES

in altering yours—it is he on whom memory lingers, he, as the second of a right and left, who leaves his image on the inward eye. The last two barrels of the day—if those have closed the Norfolk afternoon as they should, we can be almost content to have seen the last of the November partridges.

WINTER

WILD LIFE IN WINTER

It is probable that many country-dwellers who are interested in a general way in the wild life of their vicinage feel solicitude for the creatures that have to stand the brunt of winter and rough weather under the bare sky. We may provide a punctual breakfast for our flock of pensioners ; but when they finish their rations and vanish to their own devices we wonder how they fare in the deluge of cold rain, the blinding snowstorm, the gale which tears the branches from the trees. And other tribes, which do not come to our outdoor relief, rabbits and mice, squirrels and stoats, where are they in the floods and the drifts and the iron frost ?

We may be pretty sure that nine-tenths of the solicitude we feel in such cases, measuring animal needs, as our way is, by human standards, is completely wasted. The discomfort shown by some wild birds in hard weather, when they "sit brooding in the snow," is caused rather by shortage of food than by low temperature. Though feathers are wonderfully waterproof in their substance and intertexture, a night of steady rain or driving sleet cannot be a cheerful experience for a thrush or blackbird roosting in a leafless tree. It is not often, however, that birds in the wildest weather show signs of being really wet. The smaller species, such as the blue tits, sometimes look forlornly shrunk and dishevelled ; but when a robin appears at a window, as he not infrequently does, in a half-drowned condition, we may be sure that he has just been splashing with every sign of enjoyment in a handy puddle—for choice with ice in it. The domestic hen is an object of

helpless misery when out in the rain ; but the pheasant, as he paces across the lawn, keeps his bronze and purple sheen untarnished in the downpour, only his tail feathers, drooped to an accommodating angle, trailing wet and muddy on the ground. Although birds can generally defy climatic trials with little concern—as the skylark lies out with no more shield against the weather than a grass tuft or a clod in a furrow—most of the commoner British ones use some sort of shelter, something to break the full force of wind or rain—thick undergrowth, evergreens and shrubberies, and a few have learned to take advantage of the works of man and make harbourage of walls, roofs, and eaves. Apart from any needs of nesting-time, the wren haunts any creeper-clad wall, and old-established ivy is a crowded dormitory of sparrows—a preserve for the bat-fowler's art, if that Shakespearian form of sport has not wholly vanished during the last thirty or forty years ; the owl has his barn, his belfry, or his granary.

If the hap of a bird on a bough in a night of torrential rain seems to us dismal, what shall we think of those creatures whose only covert is to get under the soaked and streaming soil itself ? One of the most hopeless attempts at shelter would seem to be the little burrow which a field-mouse will make during midwinter downpours, in the flat surface of an open garden-bed—an entry which will just hold a finger, with a little spoil-bank of earth-pellets thrown out from it, and a tunnel winding for some two feet into the ground. It seems the vainest of projects, when all the soil is saturated and every hollow fills up at once with water ; but the digger is so sure of his business that when the gardener has stamped his gallery down, he will reopen it twice and thrice on successive nights. In a wet winter many of the mole's runs are subterranean water-courses ; but he is apparently untroubled by amphibious conditions, and drives his saps with the same energy with which he ploughs the dusty earth in July drought. He usually keeps to the deeper levels in winter, but has the power, among his uncanny gifts, of throwing up subsoil through a fairly strong crust of frozen turf. At the first

touch of winter rats, like harvesters going home when the summer crops are gathered, abandon their open-air burrows for snug quarters in beams and ricks. Rabbits, though they will sometimes return persistently to a warren in an open field, usually choose hedge-banks and well-drained slopes for siting their corridors and comfortably lined bunks.

Those creatures which hibernate, spending the cold season in lengthy spells of sleep or passing it in a state of suspended animation, are on a different footing from those which have to find their food in the short days ; their devices against the weather are far more careful and precise than those of the tribes which keep awake. On a night when the house rocks to the blast, or the stars glimmer through frosted window-panes, it is curious to think of all the minute lives safely laid up until spring unlocks their energies. The house shelters a few of them—a peacock butterfly with folded wings, head downward on a beam in the attic ; a queen wasp hidden in a curtain fold. Outdoors, the moths' eggs are glued in a crevice of the bark of an apple tree ; the chrysalis is belted securely to a fence post, or meshed in a cocoon under a branch ; the toad has found his way a foot below the ground under a wall ; the dormouse is curled up in the litter of a hedge-bottom ; the hedgehog tucked up under his drift of leaves. The hardest frost of a century may bind the soil, snow may drift head-high and lie for weeks, gales may strip the woods, but all the hidden life waits unconcerned until the sun calls it out again in the wakening year.

WALKS ON OLD MAPS

To a philosophic disposition all weathers are the same, with the window shut ; and when mud, frost, fog, and east wind combine to make country paths unattractive, the unfettered spirit can best roam abroad in an armchair. With an hour to spare over the fire, and a handful of one-inch Ordnance maps, the country-lover need envy no rural postman, trudging his twelve or fourteen miles a day, and can even curb his ambition to become a small-holder in a spot chosen for picturesque remoteness rather than for any advantage of markets, climate, or soil.

The mere appearance of any two or three maps of different parts of the Home Counties at once impresses the contrasts of English scenery. Here is one of part of the Weald of Sussex, dusky with its innumerable oakwoods, which crowd the map with their little plots of fields inside them, like an irregular honeycomb. Compare it with one of North Berkshire, or even of West Middlesex beyond the suburbs. Here much of the land lies almost blank, for an inch or more at a time, except for the word " field " tacked to the name of some village, which sprawls across it. Raw blows the February wind across those unfenced expanses, bottomless the sour Weald clay in those shaws under the February rain ! Time will come, *grata vice veris et Favoni*, when it is pleasant to stray again among them and make Abingdon or Tenterden at evening ; but now they are best visited on the map.

There is a lichenous richness of association in conning old routes on an old map which can outweigh the actual pleasures of walking. In the fields one is on the alert for

the right path, the view, the look of the weather, the song of the first chiffchaff or the flicker of the last swallow ; one lives in the present. In an armchair one roams wholly in the past, a hundred pasts ; each of them contributes some gleam or fragment of recollection to the patina with which the map is overlaid. Memories accumulate in its thumb-dinginess, and the firelight striking through the holes worn at its folds is the quintessence of bygone sunshine. This belt of junipers was sparkling with hoar-frost in the loneliness of a grey winter's day ; beside that long hedge on the side of the down a profusion of sweet violets had burst forth one morning in late March, the first true day of spring. The light through the young leaves in that beechwood came as limpid as through a roof of green glass ; here is the bridge under which the great trout fed, summer by summer, and beside that stream one used to get the sudden view of the abbey tower, before the young copse grew tall. When we travel the same roads again we shall not always recover the same exquisite aspects of the seasons ; but we can recapture them all in armchair travel by the side of the winter fire.

Not all the older maps in the map-drawer could be lent to the inexperienced wanderer as veracious guides. Railways have crept into regions which the maps declare void of them ; garden suburbs have risen beside the railways ; some outlying farms have perished, and there has been a heavy mortality among the inns. When personal experience makes it good, the older maps' progressive divergence from the landscape is no reason for rejecting them. They are a cipher to which we have the key. The pencilled crosses which marked the site of the new stations are almost obliterated, so long is it since we ceased to need such a reminder. Place an old square next to a new one, and there is certainly a hint of imperfection when a brisk double track of railway ends sharply at the edge of a sheet. But there is no need for the good old map to be more explicit ; it reminds us of the railway in that valley as unfailingly as of the nightingales in this wood. To throw over an old edition for a new one is to repudiate too much

of the past. A long-used map is the most enduring part of the equipage of travel, more constant than the body itself. It is said that our whole frame changes in seven years ; and a map will last much longer than that, even though it share a pocket with pipes or field-glasses. Ten miles a day for thirty days a year for ten years is no exaggerated reckoning, and this makes three thousand miles. One cannot lightly cast away a companion with which one has walked as far as from London to Montreal. A little diachylum plaster will save it yet ; mended by the fire to-night, it will be ready for the road again in spring.

WINTER COLOURING.

The general lover of Nature, as distinct from the man of science, often errs on the opposite road from that taken by the more exact observer, in paying too little attention to the minute and obscure details of the field before him. His appreciation is wide and generous, he responds instinctively to riches of colour or grace of form, to the splendour of sunsets, the energy of storms, the motion of clouds ; and often his eyes, caught by the greatness of the whole, are blind to the infinite small touches which go to its making. He may watch a butterfly poised on a head of scabious in the sunlight without a thought of the thousand imbricated scales of its wings, or look at the scintillations of the larger fixed stars or of their miniature likeness in drops of dew as the rime melts on the hazel-twigs, his mind a blank to all the optical mysteries involved in the green and crimson sparkles. Leaves and flowers may call up no recollection of the chemistry of chlorophyll or xanthin ; and it is in the world of vegetation that in all likelihood he will be most apt to overlook the part played by little things.

In high summer the countless shades of green in the landscape are mainly due to grass and trees, overpowering the minor components of the colour-scheme. But these last are for the most part perennial where the first are transitory ; and in winter, when branches are bare and pastures bleached, they take up their proper part in the decoration of the scene. It is to the mosses, the lichens, and the moulds—those myriad tiny forms of vegetation, whose names are crowded into the last pages of botany

books, where few but the specialists go—that the tints of the landscape are mainly due between November and April. We look at a naked wood, its aisles of silvery pillars and its floor of green patches between the brown of bare soil and the drifts of fallen leaves, and we may not perceive that nearly all the hues it bears are made by other forests on a microscopic scale. On the boles and branches of the trees there is hardly a square inch which is not painted by moulds and lichens; the verdure of the ground is largely moss. To moulds are due that yellow-green pigment which tinges nearly all British trees, with the exception of the birches and the firs, in regions with a fairly large rainfall and a moderate immunity from coal smoke. From the lichens come those diapered patternings in silver-green, mistletoe-green, orange, and citron, which at a close view are among the most delicately beautiful pieces of colour in Nature's range, and to which old orchards and woodlands owe the charm which masks their decrepitude and decay.

The lichens require a pure atmosphere and a moist climate; sometimes, in southern counties, their growth becomes too rampant to be pleasant to the eyes. In an old orchard sheltered in a Devonshire combe, its branches smothered in shaggy knots of blue-grey filaments, they are too obviously the parasites which the books call them, taking too usurious a toll of their hosts. Over large parts of England the air is not pure enough for their active growth, and in too many they have disappeared, replaced by the coat of soot which turns stem and spray to a solid black. To a genuine countryman it is a standing wonder, with a touch of the pathetic in it, to see the grimy twigs break year after year into the vivid green of spring, not only in city squares and suburban parks, but in regions at a wide radius from any large town. But it is not only trees which the lichens adorn; stones of every kind, mountain crag, sea-cliff, boulders of the moorland and rocks of the shore—even the hewn masonry of man's architecture—owe the varied tinting which veils their grey monotony to the many orders of the race—the sapless,



THE COTTESMORE IN FULL CRY

flowerless genera, spreading in leathery overlapping plates, forked and feathered tufts, close-packed masses of trumpets and cups, which we might think to be dead for their lack of any visible sign of growth, and immortal for their unchanging duration. They are the first of vegetation to get a foothold on newly bared surfaces of rock, the first agencies in breaking down its elements into soil for the seeds of nobler but less persistent tribes.

The mosses, though they respond in general to the same conditions as do the lichens, are nearer to ordinary vegetation. Some of them need a little root-run of earth; they ask for moisture and a cool aspect, and are happiest on the northern side of trees or stones; they may vanish altogether in long summer droughts. Their flowering and seeding are in many cases visible without the aid of a magnifying-glass. The unlearned rambler, without troubling his head about differences of *hypnum*, *bryum* or *sphagnum*, can easily distinguish the little rounded cushions of velvet pile, in hedge banks and the crotches of pollards and on the tiles of old cottages, the minute growths among the turf of a wet lawn, the loose thin growths, more like a seaweed than a moss, of wet hollows in a wood, the long sprays of stag's-horn on the high fells. In a winter walk, before the first push of snowdrops or aconites tells of the coming tide of new colour over the earth, we have time to appreciate the lowly but lasting growths which paint the landscape with a beauty not to be forgotten even in the best of June.

A HORSE FOR COMPANY

By the time March is in, roar he never so loudly, we begin to feel, even in the north, that spring is pushing through, and that we may really cast from us the sense of winter. But winter rides are the best, and it is good to reflect on the many days, pleasant and unpleasant, when one has been out and about the countryside with a horse for company. Happily, in Fife we have at least some roads that are not tarred and slippery, and even they may be left behind in excursions by tracks, woods, and fields, so there is always some variation of "the trivial round," some adventure in little, some new vision of familiar scenes in different lights. Those who ride only to hunt lose much ; those who never ride alone lose even more. Horses reveal themselves to the solitary rider.

So do many other things. One disturbs the birds so little, passing quietly on horseback ; a herd of curlews will go on feeding unmoved, and herons continue to sun themselves in the shelter of a wall. As for owls, I have seen more sitting in trees from the saddle than I ever did from the ground. One day I heard blackbirds clacking and scolding in a fir tree as they do at a cat, and on a branch quite near my head I suddenly caught sight of the face of an anxious weary old woman, asking for sympathy—a brown owl. You may hear owls cry at noon on one of those still days in late October when the jewelled cobwebs are as taut as silence, and find the results of the owls' night-hunting in a little ring of small birds' feathers on the grass, often with the beak and claws laid tidily by.

On the shortest day at sunset there burst upon me at the top of a steep field the strong silhouette of a ploughman and his team, black against a stormy cloud edged with pink. Gulls swept round, catching the last glimpse of light under their wings. In another level brown field lapwings sitting in drifts, heads up-wind, were almost invisible, showing no colour except the sickle of white underlining their bodies. Now and then one of them would lift a wing and show some more white and a flash of green. It almost had the effect of a wink.

There falls occasionally in midwinter one of those dim, cloudy days that threaten at any moment to burst into tears. They are strangely fascinating. A mild, soft air that is nevertheless without motion carries sound and scent, and yet does not even stir a head of the plumes of dry grass along the dyke-sides. You hear from very far the crack of the mallet where a new fence is being put up, and the rattle of the first turnips thrown into an empty cart. Little flutings and quirks in the hedges hint that spring is stirring. Scents are strong—moss in a wood, the pungency of manure, the rank smell of sheep penned in a bare field, an agreeable whiff of the leather of your own saddle, and perhaps (after the New Year) the unmistakable spring smell of the earth itself. You may have gone out for an hour or so on the chance of falling in with hounds, and if a covert is being drawn, the soft single note of the horn comes to you from a long distance. Ah ! then—stepping off the road on to turf, with a delicious squeeze and suck of the hoof—what wonder that horses throw up their heads and want to gallop !

About the middle of February came a wonderful day. The morning broke clear with a thick coat of hoar frost on every twig and grass blade. But the frost was keen, and instead of rain following the rime, it froze all day in the shade while the sun shone hot. A glorious sun, a heart-warming, encouraging, rhapsodical sun ! Dazzling filigree ice trimmed the burnside, and every round-headed boulder wore a collar of lace. Long fingers of ice pinned veils across the quiet pools, and fringes hung

by the waterfalls. There was not a breath of wind. Birds sang, gulls cackled. Two swans came by, flying low, circling about, pursuing each other, turning, rising, and falling, and their wings said, "Heuch, heuch, heuch." Perhaps it was they—Japanese-like decoration to the bare winter fields—that gave paradoxically an exotic feeling. Certainly there was something curious about the day, so unlike February in the North—"something rich and strange." About this time swans are restless (courting-time, no doubt), and they fly across between St. Andrews harbour and the Eden, where there is a colony of them. They travel much lower than geese, their sound is different, for they fly mute, and all you hear is that odd creak made by their strong wings. That day, too, I saw a solitary swan in the middle of an enormous ploughed field. It had every intention of walking the whole way across, which must have taken it hours, for the furrows, frozen like ribs of iron, were too far apart for its stride. It wobbled on the top of each ridge, took a step which came short, lurched into the furrow, and had to save itself by grotesque contortions. Why did it not take wing?

Perhaps it is as well to forget the unpleasant rides—days when your face is whipped and stung by sleet showers and your tongue is colder than your teeth, days when your horse is far too fresh and requires all your attention, days when it blows like fury and there is no peace anywhere. It is a storm-swept country, so one treasures the spells of calm. For then you can dawdle about, stop to gossip at a farm, mark the teams ploughing and the traffic of the carts, and the people whose business takes them about the roads in very ramshackle cars. You can cast an eye of friendship on the horses and the working dogs and get to know them all. There is a story of Dr. John Brown (of "Rab and his Friends") driving with a lady in his brougham in Edinburgh. He was craning out of the window, and she said: "Is that some one you know?" "No," he said, "It's a dog I don't know." I have every sympathy with him, having bestridden the same hobby all my life. It adds a great deal of entertainment to winter rides.

FLINT HUNTING

There are few hobbies that tend to make one so healthy and philosophic as that of prehistoric archaeology. To prosecute it with any hope of success it is necessary to go out into the open, to visit certain fields where the plough has turned up relics of antiquity, or to journey to gravel and other pits where the more ancient remains of man are, with good fortune, to be found. The disappointments awaiting those who follow the spoor of our remote ancestors are many, but these, and the glimpses they get into the great history of the human race, make prehistorians philosophic—that is, if they are of the true and unadulterated order. In searching for flint implements in ancient beds of gravel or clay it is necessary either to conduct diggings in these deposits—a very laborious and costly operation—or to visit commercial excavations, such as brickfields and ballast-pits, which are nothing less than godsend to the archaeologist. The larger the excavation, and the greater the extent of strata exposed, the better chance there is of finding specimens; but even the largest artificial pits seem sometimes too small for the ardent prehistorian, and he longs for illimitable sections.

The Cromer coast of Norfolk affords the nearest approach to this ideal condition. There, between Happisburgh and Weybourne, exist about forty miles of implement-bearing cliffs, which Nature appears to have made for the delectation of the archaeologist. And in places along the coast there are to be seen, at low water, large exposures of ancient forest bed, where massive flint implements and the fossil bones and teeth of gigantic elephants and other

beasts are to be found. The Cromer coast is not at its best, for archaeological purposes, in the summer. The prehistorian must wait for the winter and a succession of north-westerly gales and high tides. If the wind holds true and strong, and if our archaeologist be of a robust constitution and not afraid of cold and rough weather, he will, in all probability, see, when the gale subsides, a sight not easily to be forgotten.

It is at such times as these, when the sand and shingle at the foot of the cliffs are swept away, that it is possible to examine the lowermost deposits of the Cromer Forest Bed, laid down by an ancient northerly extension of the present Rhine, which flowed through a wide, shallow valley now submerged beneath the North Sea. In these deposits are to be found many roots and other portions of trees, the bones of various kinds of animals, and the great flint choppers, scrapers, and hand-axes made by the people who, in those far distant days, hunted, and loved, and died in a land overflowing with game, and enjoying a warm and equable climate. When a big scour of the beach takes place, the archaeologist's bag may indeed be heavy, and the writer remembers one memorable occasion when no fewer than two hundred and fifty humanly flaked flints—comprising chiefly flakes detached in the manufacture of implements—were recovered in the course of one winter morning. Above the forest bed, and forming the high cliffs of the Norfolk coast, are to be seen great masses of glacial clays, sands, and gravels laid down by a vast ice-sheet which advanced from Scandinavia over the land now occupied by the North Sea. These glacial beds contain flint implements derived from deposits torn up by the slowly moving ice, and if one is blessed with a cool head and physical fitness, a day upon the cliffs results, generally, in a good haul of specimens—and a voracious appetite.

The archaeologist who goes to Cromer in the winter must be no armchair scientist, nor one who has the gregarious habit strongly developed. He must be able to take pleasure in the somewhat frigid wildness of Nature, and to feel happy in his extended tramps along the coast in

the company of hooded crows and hovering sea-birds. To those to whom these things appeal it is a great and lasting experience to stand upon the shore at East Runton, for example, when an on-shore gale from the north is driving the incoming tide in foam and fury before it towards the cliffs. The rush of the wind and the roar of the sea cannot fail to give rise to a realization of the ruthlessness of the forces of Nature, a realization which is deepened when one sees in the cliffs the impressive signs of ice-action in the past. For at East Runton the seaward face of the cliff shows the most violent contortion of the strata composing it, and contains huge masses of chalk, carried along and deposited there by the irresistible power of the ice of the Glacial Period.

But, though these things are almost terrifying in their revelation of the immensity of natural forces, it is comforting and uplifting to know that man has, so far, circumvented them, and has won through in safety. We see him all through the ages, from the dim days of the Pliocene until now, gradually obtaining a control over Nature, and by degrees entering into his kingdom. And in this great struggle we see clearly, by means of the discoveries of archaeology, what a redoubtable part has been played by the early races of men whose vestiges now lie entombed in ancient strata beneath the earth's surface.

GREY-LEGS

There are few events in the lives of the little grey and red and black East Coast town. It is stagnant. It lies and sleeps ; it dozes, it oozes through the winter months, and in the summer it welters. A strange, contained, secluded life. But two events in the year are milestones on its journey, which the natives watch for, notice, and talk about on and off all the winter through. They occur in October, at the latest November ; in February, at the latest March. They are the arrival and departure of the wild geese.

A steep, dead-straight embankment runs for two miles from the quay—where no ship ever loads or unloads now—out to the pebbly beach ; and so at low tide to the mud flats and the sea. On one side is the creek, deep enough to float a fishing-boat, and beyond it salt marshes, grey, green, greyish-green, incuriously drab and dull—home lair, inaccessible almost, of curlew and redshank, snipe, and wild duck ; on the other, the fresh marshes, emerald green, firm and good to walk on, home of lapwing and golden plover, rook, hawk, and wild goose. At the end of the embankment, the sand dunes, the low pine-fringed melancholy shore, and the wide vista of the mud flats, now colourless, now ochre or mauve ; of the wind-rippled, wind-scalloped sand, and the cold infinite sea.

And bitter it is out there—hiding amid the coarse marram-grass of the sand dunes, hiding in lee of the disused lifeboat shed while the dawn breaks in hues that distinguish it not from day or night. For only slowly, imperceptibly, unknowingly as it were, land and sea and

sky are fused as one element in the morning mist. Then the grey-legs come. They come flying north-west over a low spit of sandy shore on the farther side of the creek—come from the inaccessible mud flats which lie seaward of the salt marshes. They come heralded by a clamour of high-pitched nasal voices and flying in a broad irregular phalanx, roughly, wedge-shaped; phalanx upon phalanx. Like long thin wisps of cloud they look—thousands of great birds—and then you may see them individually, high, high up, seeming to the naked eye a flock of rooks, but glasses reveal the long outstretched necks and the wide spread of the pointed wings. A few shots of gunners are heard, as, flying down the coast, the birds disappear over the pine-fringed shore. But it is no morning for the gunners. And not so do the grey-legs fly when the wind blows strong from the land, and, buffeted, they struggle in, slowbeating and flying low, to fall easy victims to the waiting guns. These wait, it is true, till the birds are past, for shot glances off the close firm breast-plumage of the goose. And for a week afterwards and more the old waterside town feasts on goose that singly weighs eight pounds, or nine pounds, or even ten pounds.

But the good times are rare for the gunners, a single one of whom may occasionally shoot as many as fourteen in a morning. Many mornings—and many evenings—are spent in fruitless waiting.

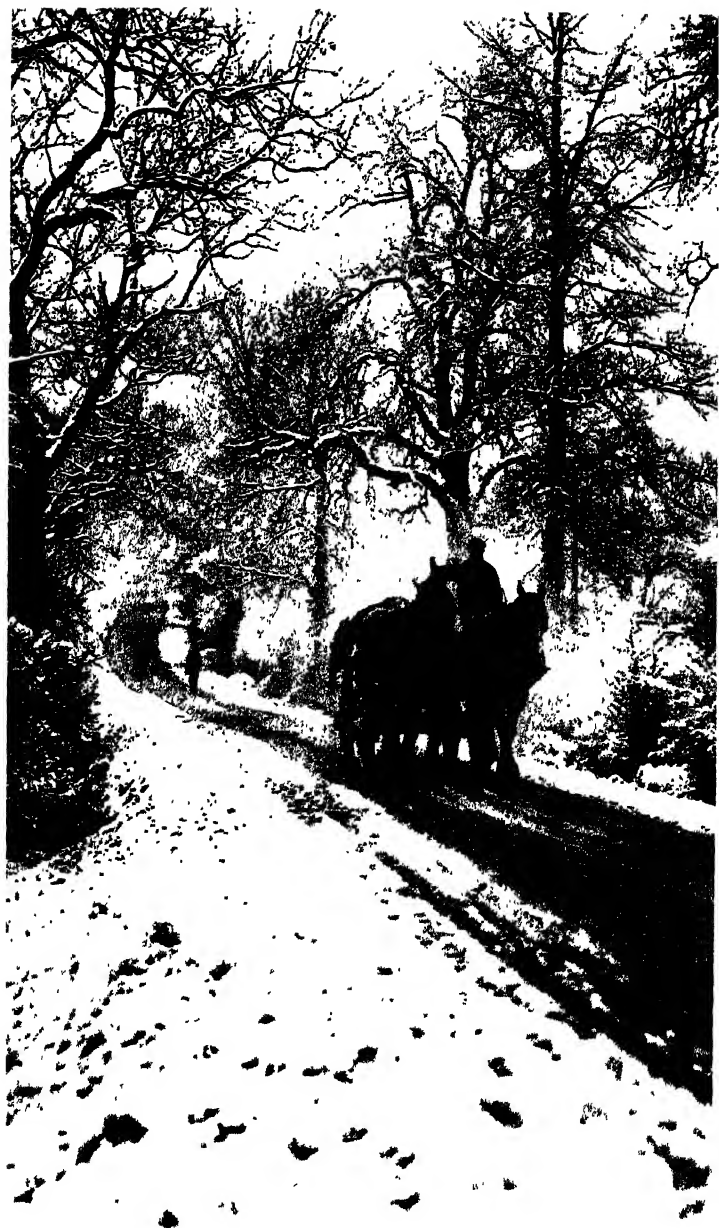
There is something in the pasture of the fresh marshes which the grey-legs cannot resist. Signs of them, feathers of them, are everywhere seen. But it is best to go seek them in the failing afternoon, when their feeding takes them within gunshot almost—but never quite—of another embankment which runs the mid-length of the marshes. Creeping up, you peep over—and there they are. In what quantity! How easily observed! What a low gabbling, what a friendly, sociable, companionable murmur—which at a guttural sound of the outlying sentry suddenly stops. Every head looks up. Every long neck poises. But seeing the distance of the stranger, they lower the heads and continue quietly to browse on the luscious grass. And the

low gabbling begins again. They are spread out in a close irregular line, the ganders being conspicuous in every little party of geese by reason of their frequent pauses to survey, their massiveness and high carriage, the dark head and neck, the dark back-plumage above the greyish-white breast. Always on the outskirts are the sentries, who never feed. Sometimes a goose squats down to rest, imparting to the observer a curious sense of placidity and content. Sometimes a gander looks up and flaps his wings mightily, as who should say, "It's time to fly, friends! It's nearly time to go to sea!"

And in the dimming light of late afternoon they fly. They rise without warning, but with loud, hoarse cries and tremendous flapping of tremendous wings. The whole marsh is roused. The gulls rise. The lapwings rise. Even the grey Denmark crows rise. The rooks, whose flocks have blackened the green near by, circle uncountably, clamorously in the air. The yellow Egyptians from the neighbouring estate fly up and back to the woods inland. And far across the fresh marsh other droves of the grey-legs rise, wing up and up, and in long irregular wedges, always rising, make out to sea.

They disappear. And again shots from the gunners are heard. But the grey-legs sail far out to the mud flats on the very edge of the sea, where through the dark hours no enemy may so much as approach—protected landward by the salt marshes. There, all together, they cackle and paddle and wash—and sleep; the only disturbing sounds being the plaintive piping of the countless waders, the raucous voices of the gulls, the hushed, pulsing sob of the waves.

But wait! Let the moon get up and they will not, after all, spend their night by the sea, but, taking wing and loudly calling, will sweep inland over the marshes, over the little sleeping town to the grass fields and the fields of sprouting wheat, so that farmers lying a-bed may hear their clangour, flying low, and murmur, "Drat 'em! Those geese again!"



A WARWICKSHIRE LANE

CLEAN ACRES

As the shortest days approach, fog, rain, and frost make a clearance of the old year's vegetation, laying the floor of earth bare to sun and light for the lowly growths of the new year. The blossoms of later summer, such as fennel and willowherb and hemp agrimony, open from one to three feet above the soil, clambering upwards in their race for the sun. Without the destruction of autumn, the competition would begin in spring where it left off. Vegetation would climb constantly skywards ; and instead of nestling violets and primroses we should get, at last, the dark aisles of tropical forests, with flowers blooming far overhead.

As the sap in a multitude of summer plants descends or evaporates, their stems become brittle, their leaves a dry papery film ; then a night of wind and rain descends, and beats them like corn in a July thunderstorm. Through winter and early spring on the hills, the red, dead bracken, with its stems laid all one way, marks where its knee-deep thickets were laid low by a November gale. In gorges, or by the windings of streams, the twisted and opposing grain of the fallen bracken tells of its fall under contending whirlwinds ; and here and there a long swath flung across the stream dissolves in successive floods. Where the hills grow grass instead of fern, grey tufts blown over by the prevailing wind remain like frozen ripples far into the succeeding year. Beneath them the skylark nests in spring, and finds defence from the windy quarter.

When the vegetation collapses in copses and hedges, the secrets of spring and summer stand revealed. Now

we see how slight a screen will hide a well-placed birds' nest through the critical weeks. A blackcap's nest slung to a briar-stem may be revealed by the fall of a single large threefold leaf ; it is astonishing to discover how it was concealed from us upon so frail an arch. Quick hedges and wayside bramble-patches abound with naked nests of the whitethroat kind—slight frames of sodden bents spotted with spider cocoons now sticky with mildew. Some hang awry, for the stems which sustained them have already dissolved ; others are still firm and elastic, and betray by their cargo of stripped seeds where the wood-mouse has held feast upon them in the autumn nights. Beneath these kitchen-middens of an alien and later race, relics of the original inhabitants can occasionally be found in the shape of fragments of egg-shell, or small dissolving bird-mummies, half bone, half feather. These traces of social disaster help to explain why old white-throats' nests are so many ; for birds must often build twice or three times before they raise a brood, or desist at summer's waning.

Great tubular wands of hemlock or cow-parsnip, like the cane in which Prometheus brought fire from heaven, will resist the dissolving power of rain, frost, and fog, and only yield to high winds. Some survive, erect but naked, among the shooting growths of next season. Wasps rasp from them their *papier mâché* for nest-building, with a noise like a mouse gnawing at skirting-boards, by the sunny banks in May. But most of the year's trashy growths melt and crumple in the moist winds and creeping fogs and the damp white frosts. Moisture is the great corrosive of dead vegetation ; given its autumn mists, the year hardly needs the more violent instrument of the winds. The moulds and toadstools that breed in autumn moisture increase corruption. Wet leaf-beds abound with white fungoid spots that break up the hard external layer of the leaves and hasten decay. Fallen twigs exude gelatinous parasites, white and grey and yellow, which melt them to mere touchwood and ooze. And at last comes frost, which splits dead woody tissues by expanding

the moisture which has penetrated them, and crumbles them with icy wedges.

Moisture in autumn destroys the wreckage of vegetation, but fosters the living plant. We may see the revival of suspended animation even in the old birds' nests which the fall of the leaf lays bare. The seeds of grasses and small woodland plants germinate in the clay of blackbirds' nests, and in the earthy tufts collected as lining by rooks ; in mild winter weather such nests are like a little salad garden. In nests largely built of moss, such as blackbirds' and hedge sparrows', the moss revives as the damp increases and covers the shrunken core with a skin of green. From nests built on a damp earthen bank, or fixed to a shady rock above a stream, the moss will even spread to the surface beyond it. The mood of frost is different. It is as hostile to live plants as to the dead, and within the limits opposed to it by Nature suspends vegetation. Only a hoar-frost covers the face of Nature with a luxuriant mimicry of real life. The outline of every twig and blade is emphasized, dead stocks and stalks are vivified with shining crystals, and the very walls and wires abound with the image of growth. A warm breath passes, and the beautiful mimicry dissolves ; it leaves the dead stems in naked corruption, and the live twigs inertly waiting for spring.

GARDEN SEATS

Friends who are leaving for sunnier climates are often envied ; but there is this consolation. In England one may sit out of doors at all seasons of the year on calm days, for it is the stillness of the air and not the actual temperature that matters.

Sitting out is valuable in winter beyond all other times, for there can be no "pottering" as in summer, and it is sad to stay in the house all day except for sharp morning and afternoon walks. At most English country houses every seat is removed and stored as soon as the summer is over, or perhaps just one is forgotten and left at the further side of a sodden lawn ; and garden seats are usually so uncomfortable that the cramp they cause would alone make people feel cold. Women will take endless trouble about their armchairs, going from shop to shop until they find the perfect kind, but they will buy a garden seat just because it is "less ugly than most," or even choose it from an illustrated catalogue. The consequence is that they may find every angle of it wrong.

A garden seat must, it is true, be hard, but the restfulness of old wooden farmhouse chairs is enough to prove that complete comfort can be attained by proper proportions of back and bench. Really well-designed seats should be procured, and then experiments should be made as to the best places for them. In winter, shelter must be the first consideration, and for this the prevailing wind has to be taken into account. If possible, there should be seats sheltered from each quarter of the compass ; a sunny aspect is best, even if the sun is not actually

shining. The view, too, is important, for English landscape has its beauty in winter as well as in summer—a beauty greater in some ways, with its delicate branch-tracery and pearly distances.

It is well to have at least one seat close to the house, for there are days when the possibility of sitting out is doubtful, and it is tiresome to carry books or work some way and to have to bring them back again at once. Before moving heavy seats, take a light chair to the spots that seem likely to make good places and try them on various days to make sure that they can be used often enough to warrant the placing there of a permanent seat. But allow only a few of the seats a permanent position. That close by the house will always be wanted, but at the first sign of spring a seat should certainly be moved somewhere into the garden, where the pleasure of seeing the first flowers come out can be enjoyed at leisure. When a good sitting place has been found, a little colony of the earliest flowers should be planted near, especially the small varieties, whose opening buds may be missed when walking. As the spring goes on, a seat in half-shade is useful, for even in March the sun can be very hot on one's head. Later a seat should be placed where the full beauty of the spring borders can be seen. People take such pains to make their gardens beautiful, but give so little opportunity to enjoy them.

The dark and dusty summerhouses which were built many years ago may not have been used much, but if a sort of little open loggia can be arranged at a good point, it will be invaluable. It will always be dry, and will give protection from any trying glare overhead. That, too, should be made the centre for particularly lovely and favourite flowers and sweet smelling things should be grown near—those that are not “fast of their smell” as Bacon says, such as sweet-briars and tobacco.

Those who possess a loggia attached to the house usually miss much of the good of it by leaving it derelict for half the year. No doubt its summer furniture and cushions must be put away to protect them from damp,

but one or two of the garden seats can be moved into it in the autumn, for on many a winter morning there is an hour or so of sunshine, which can be happily spent in the loggia. Very good teak garden armchairs are now to be had ; they are quite weather-resisting, and two or three of these are a great addition to its comfort.

Only in the summer is it possible to have garden seats on the grass. At other times of the year they should be on gravel or stone, and even then a good wooden foot-rest should be supplied. Seats should not be under the drip of trees, and they should be rubbed over every day with a soft rough cloth. This only takes a few moments, and will prevent them becoming covered with green mould.

COLOUR IN THE LAKE COUNTRY

Few can guess at the beauty of colouring that January brings with it in the Lake Country. The new life begins to stir in the birch copses and in the alders, and deep plum-purple suffuses them. The mosses on the walls renew their emerald, and make the grey lichens shine out like silver in contrast. And the pollarded ash trees stand up like white coral against the blue-grey distance of vale and fell.

But the miracle of colour in the copses is wrought by the ruddy oak tree leafage, and on the road-sides by the golden copper colour of the beech hedges, while the Japanese larches burn upon the fell-side in glory of blood-red gold. As for the fell-sides, the tops shine out in dazzling snow against blue sky and all the lower grounds are draped with russet from the bracken.

Beautiful as this fern-clad colouring is, it is each morning made more wonderful by the rising of the valley mists, that in the sunshine make the mountain-sides seen through the hyacinthine mist to shine in rainbow hues. All the colours of the prism seem shed upon these lower slopes. The magical opalescent veil of this early mist with its filmy fingers of lawn transforms everything it touches. It swims up into the woodland, making each tree it lingers round bewitching in its tender softness, or, floating out over the valley, gives the enchantment of new distance to the sleepy lake.

But above all the January day at the Lakes enables one to see the morning made. The summer tourist knows nothing of the rising sun ; now he cannot help its acquaint-

ance. He will wake when all the hills stand jet black against a glimmering dawn, and if he has the luck I had one New Year Day, he will understand what Wordsworth meant :—

Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.

For there as I watched I saw one glorious lamp, the Morning star, shine above Loughrigg's ebon mass in clear green-silver sky, and building up a great pillar of light in the unruffled mere that lay like polished steel below. Away eastward between Wansfell and Loughrigg this same green-silver sky was barred with clouds of jet that slowly turned to purple, and as the green background changed to lemon yellow, and so to saffron, that purple bar became light violet.

Very slowly came the day, and it was a good hour and a half before, above molten bars of blood-red gold, the sun wheeled into sight over the hill and faintly flushed the woodlands and put to silence the hooting owl. But even then the change in earth and sky went on. Up to the zenith flocculent clouds like flights of flamingoes, rosy pink of underwing, streamed ever westward. The green-silver sky that had made the lake look as if a fall of finest snow were covering a frozen mirror had passed into lightest blue, and the water was already beginning to rejoice in colour stolen from the sky. Meanwhile the heights of Fairfield and Seat Sandal had flushed into rose, and the great velvet shadow from Buthar crags was filling Greenhead Ghyll. As the sun rises that shadow, unlike the shadow of Michael's sorrow, at the sheepfold that Wordsworth immortalized, ceases to fill the Greenhead Ghyll, and the great breast of Stone Arthur brightens into rosiest red, till the upper bracken touches the snow line and the great white sheet that lies upon the body of the dead Arthurian king, whose face is upturned to sunny sky in solemn sleep, appears broidered with silver and red gold.

Happy are the eyes that can watch the movements of morning light with all its changes on that noble mountain mass. Coleridge as he murmured out the paragraphs of

“ The Friend ” to Sarah Hutchinson in the Allan Bank study saw it, Dorothy in her little room above was melted into ecstasy at the sight of it, and Dr. Arnold knew it well. Happy too are the feet that can wander up on to Silver How on such a day and marvel at the beauty of the mountain juniper and holly so green against snow-white distances or the molten flood of fern.

But what impresses the wanderer in January is the silence of the vale. The sturdy little mountain sheep are pecking away on the high fells for food, but are voiceless ; the ravens are not heard. There is no sound of coach-horn or motor hoot ; only the clank of an anvil is heard in the valley, and the tranquillity sinks into the soul. In the quiet depths of the lake the silent sky, the white hill tops and sunny slopes lie so clear that one cannot tell when reality and dreamland meet, so absolute is the reflection in the mirror of the flood. The reeds like burnished amber border the shore, and here and there in the shallows, as though a thousand naiads were keeping holiday with bannerets in hand, the fairy reed feathers shine like silver in the sun.

If the hearts that cannot rest could enter into this January paradise they would realize that earth has medicine for all human ache, and would be able to understand what Wordsworth meant when, describing the Vale of Grasmere in “ The Prelude,” he wrote :—

Nowhere else is found,
Nowhere, or is it fancy, can be found
The one sensation that is here. . . .
'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose.

But to see the evening made is as great a wonder as the miracle of morning-tide. The sun sinks beyond the western hills, and a light lemon colour begins to flush right up to a cloudless zenith.

The snows on Fairfield become suffused with the same pale lemon light, and the bracken which, when the sun first dropped behind the fell, had gone dead and colourless, suddenly awakes into new life and light. It is a world

of faerie. There is no sun, and yet a new dawn seems breaking o'er the vale. The trees stand up in black lace-like beauty against the sudden splendour, and one asks oneself why they cast no shadow on the ground. Every living thing is touched by the unearthly witchery of this afterglow. Children stop in their play, and the sheep lift their heads and gaze. The wonder grows and grows. The lemon colour upon the snowy Fairfield moves into a rosy flush. The bracken slopes burn. Then in a moment the afterglow ceases, a sudden pallor falls upon the snow, the bracken darkens, and the day is dead.

AMONG THE ALDERS

The pale light of a mild winter day spreads fitful gleams over the sodden bracken of a Herefordshire hill. On the top of it the rounded contour is broken by the embankments of a hill-fortress, that may have sheltered Caractacus himself, and doubtless wore a sufficiently threatening appearance when the Roman legionaries struggled through swamp and thicket, under the command of Ostorius Scapula, campaigning against the Silures. Even now, trench after trench and bank behind bank would make the place a very ugly one to rush with the bayonet if it were held by a handful of resolute defenders.

The peaceful country round it is all under cultivation now, pleasantly diversified by fields and hedgerows and dotted with cottages and farms, but at one spot it retains a little of its native wildness.

Here a small stream winds through a patch of swampy ground, where the grass is coarse and overgrown with rushes, and what Tennyson called the wet-shot alders stand, over their boot-tops in mire, and have formed a grove of dark stems. When winter begins to give way to the first faint stirrings of spring, this grove takes on a colour like nothing else in Nature, for the buds at the tip of each twig appear as if covered with a pale purple powder, something like the bloom of a damson, and, against a background of red bracken, make a curious colour scheme in the watery sunlight of February. That time is not yet, but the alder grove is worth a visit none the less for another reason. Most of the trees, especially those that are near the edge, are thickly hung with sprays of small dark cones,

opening now and offering their seeds to certain small birds whose main winter sustenance they are.

Goldfinches, the most elegant of all British birds, are hard at work among them, moving from tree to tree with a flash of black and yellow. It is pleasant to be able to testify that legislation, often a mere dead letter as far as birds are concerned, has greatly increased the country's stock of native goldfinches. The bird-catcher, always the laziest wastrel in a village, threatened at one time almost to exterminate them. Being a wily rascal, he used to catch surprising numbers, dispatching them to Birmingham and other large towns by the hundred every season. Some few survived as cage birds, but most did not live for more than a week or two after capture, and perhaps, considering all things, might be counted happy in their death. The law has now eliminated the prowling loafer, with his box cage and bundle of limed twigs, and goldfinches are steadily increasing. They have no monopoly of the alder seeds, however, for among the trees on this winter morning are several small flocks of red-polls and siskins. Both of these birds are aliens, but desirable ones, coming down from the north, and seldom remaining to breed here. The red-polls are miniature linnets, pea-linnets the bird-catcher used to call them. Clad in sober brown, they do not readily attract attention, but they wear crimson caps on their heads, and many of the cocks have their breasts covered with a beautiful roseate flush. As cage birds they lose this red after the first moult, but they always retain their cheerful habits and a black mark under the beak like a smart little imperial.

The siskins are more graceful in shape, and, first cousins though they are to goldfinches, resemble tits in their activity and acrobatic feats. Olive green and yellow are the prevailing colours of their plumage, and the old cock birds have glossy black caps which are wanting in the more demurely clad hen. They show little fear of a human intruder, and, indeed, if any bird may be said to take kindly to captivity, it is the siskin. It will take a seed from the finger before it has been a fortnight in a cage, and with



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reasonable care will live for eight or nine years, always ready to burst into song at the least provocation. Siskins are regular winter visitants to the alder trees by the stream-side, but their numbers vary greatly from year to year.

From the far end of the grove a thin spiral of blue smoke rises up into the December air, and a sound of chopping warns these lovers of the alders of eviction and introduces the human visitor to a quaint and little-known trade. Two cloggers have bought the trees, and are hard at work felling them and converting them into soles that will presently clatter on the pavements of the factory towns of Lancashire. All good clogs are made of alderwood, and the cloggers are a race apart, following their trade all the year round by the stream sides where the alders grow. They fix up a temporary canvas shelter for themselves, and operate a simple machine that looks like a magnified bread-cutter. With dexterity born of long practice, they take split sections of alderwood, give them two or three skilful cuts with a large, keen blade working loosely on its swivel, and throw aside the roughly shaped soles of clogs. That is the first process ; the next is to build up these soles in a hollow cone, several feet in diameter and as tall as, or taller than, a man. Here they stand for weeks, stained a bright orange with sap and conspicuous from afar, for the wind to percolate through them and the sun to dry them, and then they are packed up on trucks and sent to have leather uppers fitted to them with brass nails, and irons put underneath, and appear in the shops as complete clogs. The cloggers are generally a quiet, kindly folk, though looked at rather askance by the gamekeepers. There are not many of them in the country, and the trade and the aptitude for it descend from father to son for many generations.

Alders quickly grow again after being cut, so the birds will not be banished for long, and in these bustling times more than a touch of romance hangs round a task that leads the craftsmen down a succession of valleys through the most beautiful scenery of England and Wales, and accompanies them always at their work with the music of running water.

RABBITING WITH BEAGLES

In February only the rabbits are left. To-day we are to shoot them over beagles—or in front of beagles, rather, the idea being to station the guns at one end of the covert and to put the beagles in at the other. It is a form of shooting which does not belong to every part of the country, but has long flourished in Kent, Sussex, and others of the southern counties. Moreover, to those who love the sound of a huntsman's horn and the cry of hounds, the opening of the pack unseen and far away in the covert is the most inspiring music.

The meet is at the farm, which lies on the skirt of the park, and, while the guns collect, the keeper has news to give of the work he has had in the past day or two in laying out the rabbits. There are various ways of ensuring that the little beasts, or a good proportion of them, shall be above ground instead of in their buries when the day comes for shooting. Running ferrets through the buries is one way, for the rabbits will not go back if they can help it till the scent has cleared ; but it is a slow and tiresome job, for the ferret may kill below ground, and then you have the weary business of finding the kill with a line-ferret and possibly digging out the two into the bargain. A much better plan, though it entails some hard work and needs an energetic man, is to go the round of every bury and to place in every hole, as far down as possible, a small quantity of some evil-smelling mixture—there are nauseous compounds sold for the purpose. During the following night, if it is fine and dry, the rabbits will come out to feed, and the next morning the keeper, with the stroke of a spade and the

stamp of a heavy boot, fills in the entrance to each hole. The rabbits, preferring clean bramble and fern to tar and paraffin, will be found above ground later in the day.

And here are the hounds ! A closed cart, drawn by a rough-coated skewbald farm pony, lumbers up the hill. There descends from it, begaitered, grey-smocked, grey-locked, of the cheerfulest habit—Falstaff. You will find nothing ruddier, nothing more nobly round, among huntsmen of beagles. *Ore rotundo* he addresses his hounds, and his figure suits his mellow voice. Will he stay the day with his pack ? You will see. Down comes the tailboard of the cart, and out tumbles a cataract of black and white and tan, all sizes, all shapes, from the “little singing beagle,” standing perhaps twelve inches, to what may be a mixture of otter-hound and foxhound with a touch of Toby—seven and a half couples guaranteed to nose out any rabbit on four legs in the nearest hundred acres of Sussex wood.

The guns, eight of them, move off across the park to take up their stands in a ride traversing the slope of a hill. The pack, apparently given a moment's law before being taken up the road, is suddenly seen streaming in full cry towards a little dip in the park grass. A rabbit has been put up which goes to ground there, and as the guns turn to look and laugh, a cock pheasant gets up with a prodigious crowing from the very middle of the pack and flies low and fast to the wood on the hill. The huntsman's horn calls back the hounds, and the guns cross a fence to the ride beyond.

How pleasant to wait at the corner of a covert, with green rides running two ways, a blue sky over hazel catkins, a west wind blowing, sunlight in clay puddles in the ride, and the scent of wet earth rising rich and warm from moss and root and hazel-stub ! And how melodious the outcry far up the hill, as the first rabbit (you guess) is on foot before the pack—a sound broken by the report of a gun, and followed by silence till the pack opens again ! Hounds are lower down the hill now, and—is that a rabbit ? A blur of grey and white, a joyous tongue behind it, the black nose

is too close and you cannot fire ; the rabbit doubles among the stubs, doubles again, dashes across the ride, and rolls over and over among rain-rotten leaves.

We move off to other rides and other coverts, taking oblong after oblong of wood and leaving each in turn, as we hope, rabbitless behind us. Now and then you may catch sight of a beagle actually finding his quarry, checking, stiffening, nosing forward and dashing in as he scents and sees. And behind and with his hounds, stalking through the morning among chestnut and hazel and oak and gorse, the grey-smocked huntsman will be seen in glimpses and his horn and his high and sonorous hallooing will be heard. "Aie ! Aie ! Forrard, forrard, forrard ! Push 'em out there, push 'em out ! Truelove, Truelove ! Rummager boy ! Rummager boy !" All through the morning, all through the afternoon, that cheery, mellow voice and the music of the horn sound about these Sussex rews and ghylls ; through hour after hour small grey forms dart over the floor of the woods to the crackle of guns. Once or twice a hare is afoot. "Ware hare !" you hear. "Don't shoot 'em here, I think," the huntsman mutters to his smock, his brow glistening ruddy in the sun. "Call 'em off, anyhow." But a moment afterwards, once more the melodious horn, and that prolonged and haunting echo of "Rummager bo-oy ! Rummager bo-oy !"

THE CHISEL OF THE RAIN

Lowland floods leave little lasting mark on plain or dale ; the grey lakes subside, the flocked wildfowl seek more permanent refuges, and the map of lanes and fields comes out unchanged from its wintry bath. In many mountainous landscapes the scouring force of flood water is far greater, and every exceptional freshet somewhere remoulds the face of valley or hill. Certain ranges, like the Longmynd in Shropshire, are so ancient that the force of water has almost ceased to act upon them. Ages ago the softer rock was torn away and carried to the lowlands, and the hills stand with steeply rounded flanks and the same garb of wood or crag from generation to generation. Since surface erosion is all but over, and all soluble elements have long been shed from the inner rock, the streams from these ancient hills are very clear, and none yield purer water to the towns. But most of our hills and mountains are still being fashioned, and have not yet reached perfect form. Every violent rainstorm or sudden thaw widens the angle gouged in soft shingle by descending torrents. No winter ends without the mountains being a little altered, and once or twice in a lifetime the fall of a giant boulder or the collapse of a crumbling cliff wall from its yellow matrix shows that the age of violent change is not yet past.

The sudden melting of a heavy snowfall causes some of the widest lowland floods ; but snow is not one of the fiercest of Nature's instruments of erosion. Snow avalanches in the Alps may sweep away forests and dwellings, but do not tear the rock or much carve the soil. The collapse of steep wet earth in a thaw is chiefly the work of

the frost. It parts the layers by expansion on freezing, and they crumble when the frost goes out of them. If snow thaws slowly, it has the same effect in mountain valleys as a lake ; it pays out the water gradually and prevents destructive floods. When a quick thaw follows a heavy snowfall the case is changed, for now the moisture that was arrested in solid form is suddenly melted and liberated. Warm rain acting on snow in mountains causes violent floods, yet seldom the most violent. The average yield of a foot of snow is only an inch of rain ; and even in our own climate we often get an inch of rain in less time than it takes a foot of snow to thaw. Melting snow in January drowns the earth because it is soaked with the rain and snow of earlier winter, and February for the same reason may be wetter still ; but snow in the early year seldom leaves the earth much altered. Within sight of the Longmynd in clear weather stands a steep Welsh ridge overlooking a green and narrow valley. Deep in its lap lie pastures and hayfields, but the verdure of one broad slope under the ridge is half hidden by a wilderness of grey boulders. These ravaged fields are the enduring mark of a great rainstorm that broke above this valley more than one hundred and fifty years ago, one day in October. Warm winds from the sea condensing their vapour on the cold mountain tops wrought this scene of devastation, not ice nor snow. This gush of rocks still closely recalls a similar scene on the Simplon Pass when a glacier broke bounds twenty or thirty years ago. Some of the rocks in the Welsh counties may have been laid down by like forces in their day, but the ice age in Britain is over.

Summer thunderstorms have great erosive power even among gentle hills. The storm which tore Louth, under the Lincolnshire wolds, is still widely remembered ; less was heard of a storm hardly less remarkable which smote the Chiltern Hills in the spring of 1918, when weather news was being suppressed for warlike reasons. The storm burst, as usual, in the afternoon, with violent rain and hail, and the flood tore down the long dry combes several feet in depth, and entered many houses. More

singular was the path of the escaping water from a broad plateau where it found the track of no old stream. It tore down the hillside through clay and gravel a trench some three feet wide and four or five deep, with vertical sides and sharp edges—a genuine instance of “canyon structure,” of which the far-famed example is the path of the Colorado River in America. That river has grooved its road between two precipices because in that arid desert there are no lateral tributaries ; and this Chiltern flood cut its trench in the same way through dry ground on which little or no rain had that day fallen.

Bogs, like lakes and snow, store the moisture of heaven and dispense it to the streams thereafter. But a bog is less stable than a lake and less pure than a snowdrift. Overcharged bogs create the most viscid and repellent of avalanches ; the flood of creeping slime shows Nature in a mood not merely ruinous but loathsome. Best known in Ireland, they have also befallen moorland districts in England ; the socket of a burst bog is one of the rawest of Nature’s sores.

A DEVONSHIRE LEY

It is still dark and very cold when we creep down through the sleeping house to the gun room, and steal out of the side door on to the lawn. Near the stables one of the spaniels barks furiously, but at a word from a familiar voice all is quiet again. In a moment both dogs are racing round in the frenzy of excitement, always provoked by the sight and smell of a gun. We cross the lawn, crisp under foot in the starlight, and emerge on the lane which winds its way down, through wind-flattened hedges, to the sea. There is no wind this morning, but a sharp frost. There will be duck in the ley, but we shall have to be quiet. We turn the last corner of the lane and come in sight of the sea, and there, out on the horizon, is the Eddystone, sweeping the sky with its long white finger of light. The lane ends in the seashore, and we turn to the rough line of sand hills that separates the shore from the ley, with its fresh water, reeds, and mud, a favourite haunt of duck. As we take up our stations behind the bank, with our backs to the sea, the first signs of dawn are showing behind the low hills in the east.

Sound carries far in the cold still air, and there is a fascination in listening to all the "talk" that is going on in the ley. What birds are in? Plover, of course—several are calling; and there is the familiar whistle and occasional high-pitched quack of teal. Snipe are scaping as they move from place to place, and at intervals a moor-hen crows on its curious creaky note. Accompanying all is a steady chorus from the ducks quacking and chattering as they

start to collect. The sky slowly brightens, and the noise increases, with the restlessness always apparent just before the hour of flight. We crouch still and wait, while the old spaniel's tail beats softly on the sand, the only indication of suppressed excitement. Suddenly there are birds overhead, but flying inland. They are gulls, ever early on the move. Then birds are all round us, tumbling like leaves in the wind. We grip our guns and start up, but these are plover, and we are out for better game. At last we hear the sound for which we are waiting, the even wing-beat of the ducks, and, faintly against the fading stars, see them coming. They are low and unsuspicious, and two fall—one to each gun—far back on the sands behind. The shots cause a general commotion, and another lot come over, much faster, and higher to the right. Get one, and swing round for your second barrel as they go away ; but you swing from dawn into night, and they are lost in the blackness before you can fire.

There is a short pause, and then a bunch of teal come over. They are not too high, but they see the guns and shoot up into the sky like rockets. Two shots ring out, but nothing falls. Another small bunch come over, flying like the wind, and your companion stops one with a marvellously quick shot—no time for a second barrel. It is still again now, and lighter, and you first hear and then see a big flock of duck passing out to sea. No doubt the first shots sent them inland up the valley to gain height, and now they go by far up and out of shot. We gather what we have and scramble over the sand banks down to the ley.

The middle of the little valley is filled with high reeds ; there is open shallow water on both sides, and narrow strips of turf separate the water from the fields on either hand. The spaniels know the place well, and plunge into the reeds ; the guns walk up, one on each side. It is much lighter now, and from an open pool in the reeds a duck rises and flies up the valley. You see him turn and he looks like coming right over your head as you

crouch behind an old stone wall. However, he veers off giving you a long, but not difficult, shot. He falls with a crash in the high reeds—a bad place to find a bird. Both spaniels are hunting the reeds and see nothing, but presently the old dog who is deaf (and fully aware of the fact) comes out to look for orders. You signal to him to come ashore, and then wave him out to where the duck has fallen. Off he goes, and you see the reeds shaking as he flounders about in the mud and shallow water. He has no luck and looks out again. You signal to him to go back, and after a bit the rustling of the reeds stops and there is silence. Then very slowly you hear him returning. Out he comes with the duck in his mouth, and, swimming deliberately across, deposits it proudly at your feet. It is a drake shoveller, the most handsome of all British ducks, and one rarely seen on this shoot.

It is full daylight now, and we are near the short cut through the fields to the house. The reeds die away here and the stream that feeds the ley flows down through soft and spongy banks. It is a good place for snipe, but we think of hot baths and breakfast and turn for home. When we open the gate both dogs are off like mad things for the house. They know the last act. Under the table in the passage are two steaming bowls of bread and milk, and as we go upstairs two brown heads are buried in two white bowls, while two brown tails wave their satisfaction.

MOORLAND FOXHUNTING

The middle of the moor is no place for unattended strangers on horseback. Those who care to cross it on foot can indeed walk or scramble almost anywhere, and even if overtaken by a mist may follow the bank of the smallest stream with the certainty that it will lead, through innumerable bogs, to a river, and thence to a road and to civilization. But the first bog or rock clitter defeats a horseman, and even on apparently sound going a horse may, without warning, sink up to his girths in soft, black soil, or stumble, only to find his foot firmly wedged in a chink between two granite boulders, overgrown with heather.

In the most favourable weather a visitor could hardly hope to ride off the moor alone, unless he struck one of the few stone walls, which must necessarily follow solid ground. In a mist he would be obliged to abandon his horse or to wait, perhaps many hours, for help to arrive or for the mist to clear. The ability to ride safely and speedily in all weathers is acquired only from years of experience, and a visiting foxhunter will do well to entrust himself at once to a local farmer, or to one of the little group of sportsmen who know the moor, not hill by hill, but peat hag by peat hag. An hour or two in the company of some of these experts is indeed a revelation. They may have ridden many miles over undulating heather and rough grass, unaided apparently by any distinguishing landmarks or by any vestige of a path, and proceed to skirt a bog, leading to the other side the horses of the huntsman and his whipper-in, who have dismounted to draw it on foot.

Then, perhaps, a discussion will arise as to the whereabouts of "the other peg," and attention is thus drawn to the fact that the questioner is sitting with his pony's nose exactly over a small wooden peg—an object of priceless value in such a barren landscape to anyone who wishes to tie up his mount while he eats his bread and cheese, or clears some obstruction out of a hard-worked drain. The safest path across even the most monotonous ground is as well known to these moorland foxhunters and as precisely followed as if it were specially marked with red carpet. Nor is it wise for any in their wake to diverge one inch from the track of their hoofprints.

The process of finding a fox on the moor provides a wonderful exhibition of the huntsman's craft. A curled-up fox occupies but one square yard, and in several thousand acres of moorland there are situations innumerable which offer a comfortable bed. Those favourite spots which offer also the chance of a breakfast are well known—a sheltered bank beside a little pool where frogs resort, or the rushes on the fringe of a bog, for the bogs contain insects and so attract birds and beasts. But the successful huntsman does not wander vaguely from bog to bog. He carefully watches how his hounds are drawing, and inclines in the direction which they appear to favour. It is only in the early morning that hounds can speak to a drag, showing where a fox has returned to his bed at dawn. However, they can often feather on a drag which is many hours old, and even on a bad scenting day may cross the line of a fox who has lately been disturbed. Thus their keenness or indifference at any particular spot is an indispensable gauge of the chances of a fox being close at hand.

When eventually they do hit off a line, the behaviour of individual hounds becomes more important than ever. For then arises the great problem whether or not they are running heel—that is to say, hunting the line away from their fox. But the surest evidence is only to be gained from a thorough knowledge of the hounds and of the characteristics of each. Some hounds will run heel with

the utmost confidence. Some will run a little way and then stop, and look up at their huntsman as if to warn him that all is not as it should be. A very few will rather trot beside the huntsman's horse than be led astray with the body of the pack.

As soon as the fox jumps up among the hounds, or is viewed stealing away through the peat hags, then the chase passes from the realms of detective science into those of dead reckoning and other aids to intricate navigation. A few hurried exchanges between those of the elect will decide the plan of campaign. For the possibility of keeping in touch with the pack invariably depends upon the use of one of the "crossings." Through the middle of some six or eight of the most exasperating bogs, lying between important points of vantage, narrow paths have been built, metalled with granite where necessary, and marked at either end with tall posts, retaining traces of a former whiteness. Each crossing possesses a name, and in at least one case a bronze tablet on a small granite pillar records that "this crossing was made for the benefit of moormen and fox-hunters" in memory of a well-known sportsman.

The hunting of the fox involves much galloping to these invaluable crossings and many other detours to avoid hidden disaster, so that the amount of houndwork to be seen and enjoyed is less than might be expected in such an open country. But the glimpses of the flying pack never fail to provide enough thrills, culminating sometimes in defeat, but more often in a growling scuffle in a patch of rushes, or a disappointed baying at a hole in a rock clitter. In the one case the local experts will examine the mask and pronounce it to be that of "the old fox from Bleak Down." In the other they will forthwith conjure up a spade from beneath an adjacent boulder, just five miles from the nearest habitation, with that serenity characteristic of the moor and of those who guard its secrets.

ON THE ROMAN WALL

The calendar asserted it to be winter and called evidence in the shape of languishing patches of snow in the higher crannies ; but it was really four days of open spring weather, save that the wind rioted a trifle too boisterously, and the countryside showed greens and browns a trifle too dull. Good campaigning weather, too, in which to watch the crows as they came sweeping up over the moors, like the Picts of old, in black, excited droves to where the rabbits awaited them nestling behind their ramparts of grass and rock, like the Roman sentries.

Lest the gift of such weather should make us overweening, let us at once admit that the Wall itself is intrinsically no stupendous monument. Rome has left memorials far more majestic and complete than a mere line of masonry seventy-three miles long, of which there is left just enough to make the tracing of it an exciting game. There are great gaps even in the best stretch between Chesters and Thirlwall, and everywhere else the Wall has declined to faint traces—a low grassy ridge mottled with fragments of stone and mortar ; a banked-up hedge wherein great trees have wound their roots protectingly around a few ordered blocks ; a road on an unusually high level, flanked by an unusually wide ditch on the north side. The remains of camps, mile castles, and turrets are disappointing and many are still disintegrating.

Even where they are covered, there is no great diminution of the interest of the Wall. Even if it represented no very striking architectural, engineering, or even physical effort, granted the abundance of stone and the forced labour of

fatigue parties, it would still stand for an immense moral effort, a fine strategic conception, a great idea, a big system. The Wall was garrisoned by Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Germans, Spaniards and Rumanians, under an authority which sent men from Palmyra to the Tyne with as little fuss as we send them to-day from Paisley to Peshawar. The man who ordered it to be built was the same who had his country seat at Tivoli. There was an Aelian Bridge over the Tyne and over the Tiber. Even to-day at some points on the Wall—Peel Crag for example—the panorama gives an impression of what a Roman frontier meant. Behind are tidy arable fields, neat farmhouses, great roads driving straight and far. In front is the sullen bog and brown uncultivated waste of barbarism. The Wall signs our country with the sign of civilization. We may be as proud of it as the *bourgeois* who finds his name in an aristocratic family tree.

So much it is necessary to say because Mr. Kipling has breathed upon these *disjecta membra* and transformed them into "one roaring, rioting, cock-fighting, wolf-baiting, horse-racing town." This is romantically glorious, though it may be historically fantastic. On the other hand, I humbly dissent from the view that the Wall was not meant to be defended throughout its length. A very careful study of the best preserved portions will reveal that the fosse is dug wherever there is not some absolutely insuperable obstacle immediately in front.

The objects found on the Wall—inscriptions, statues, vases, coins—may appear interesting only to the historian, but many of them are very human documents. The coin of Titus in the Blackgate Museum of Newcastle, with its proud legend "*Judaea Capta*," is thrilling. The wonderful find of over two hundred gold coins at Corstopitum, which make the Imperial mint a rival to that of any Greek State, is tempting. The mould of the kilted gentleman leaning on a wavy stick must at once be dubbed "Harry Lauder," and a copy of him was asked of the owner by a learned professor under that name. This is as laughable as the funeral tablet of the Palmyran who died on the Wall

is pitiful. Among inscriptions, that recently unearthed, again at Corstopitum, with the legend Legio ^x_{xx} brought Mr. Kipling triumphantly to the spot to behold confirmation of his guess that the thirtieth was a Wall unit. Perhaps, and perhaps not. Finally, in the museum at Chesters, may be seen side by side the inscription of the Guards officer and the scratchings of the private militiaman. The former was Q. Petronius Urbicus, a Brescian, of the Fabian gens, on an altar to I.O.M. (Jovi optimo maximo). Round I into D and you get the dedication on nearly every church in Italy. The latter was an unknown artist who drew like Taffimai on the reindeer bone.

Every pilgrim of the Wall has his own adventures, and I will conclude with that which was vouchsafed to me. Nobody will believe it, but none the less it is true. I was sitting in a small cleft in the cliff near Sewingshields, eating sandwiches, when from the valley below there came a thunder of hoofs on the wind, and four horsemen cantered slowly into view. Right opposite me they stopped, shouted, and seemed to shake their fists. Remembering the sour temper of the patriarch at Borcovicus whom I had disturbed at his lunch, I was deciding that the tourist was strangely unpopular in those parts when, over the rock on my left, there appeared a fox as big as a donkey. Up I jumped, wild with excitement, and rushed to the top of the cleft. There was the whole lovely hunt, red coats, rat-catcher, and five or six couple of hounds scenting delicately along the core of the Wall. Out rang the horn from below, like a trumpet summoning to surrender. "Leu! Leu!" cried the huntsman. Down loped the fox into my cleft and along the cliff with the hounds after him. With a yard between him and a sheer drop, he turned under their noses and made off across the meadow with the hounds, myself, and the hunt (in that order) after him. I did not get far, because I caught my foot in a stone from that wretched Wall and went down like a shot Pict. When I arose, all inglorious without, they were gone. The last time I had seen a pack was passing under the arches of the aqueduct of Claudius, and here they were

upon the rubble of the Wall of Hadrian. The curiosity of incongruity, you declare. Well, perhaps not quite. For I remembered a portly vase of Samian ware from Corstopitum on which the potter had cunningly moulded two flamboyant greyhounds chasing a delightfully startled hare. *Magnum est venari et praevalabit.*

THE KNOLL

The knoll was a perfectly formed sugar loaf a trifle more than seventy feet high, and about as much above sea level. It rose abruptly from the plain, and without rival in sight it seemed higher than it really was. With its cap of pines it was a landmark for miles round, and though it figures on old maps as Signal Hill, was known to its owners and the neighbourhood simply as the Knoll.

The pines owed their existence to an admiral forebear, who, about a century ago, wished to have a landmark close to his house which he could see from his ship as she passed up and down Channel. The knoll itself was not high enough, so the admiral bethought him of a cap of Scots pines for it, and in the fullness of years they were plainly visible from ships in the Channel some thirteen miles away. They were, at least, in clear weather, though the admiral never saw them, as he died ten years after they had been planted. There were only six trees in all, no more than fifty feet high—the wind saw to that—and with a decided list from the south-west; but they were sturdy trees and so clustered that their topmost branches were interlaced into an almost impenetrable canopy which the midday summer sun could scarcely pierce with a single ray. Their feet were riddled with rabbit holes, the intricacies of which, in course of years, must have been as familiar to the keeper's ferrets as to the rabbits. The pines had all the nobility of their race, and when the evening sun lit up the pearly-grey scales of the trunks they made a moving picture.

Although the landmark was the common property, as it were, of the countryside, no stranger could possibly understand what those trees meant to the general and his family on whose land the knoll was. Hurricanes of years had torn away the lower branches of the pines, leaving jagged stumps which the surgeon son itched to saw off close to the stem, as, in the jargon of his hospital, Nature's carpentry was bad. The gardening son wished them left, as, heedless of the gales, he thought the stumps would give hold to clematis with which he had bedecked several ruined apple trees in the orchard, to the delight of all who saw them in May. The other boys voted for leaving the stumps, as the "shinning-up" of the trees and the "passing" from bough to bough of the canopy—neither easy nor without risk—were part of the unofficial education of each son, and the stumps helped the process.

Eventually, wind having beaten the clematis, the surgeon had his way, but not before the naval son, home from the Britannia with a pocketful of tenpenny nails, had driven them in at intervals up one of the trunks, so that with foot on one and hand on another the rather perilous ascent of old was shorn of its terrors. To the mother of the brood, a gracious woman of middle age, the pines were something more than landmark or playground during those fateful years of War, while she was stripped of her men and worn out with the daily "grind" of the hospital into which she had turned her house. God and the pines and her understanding Airedale, who shadowed her everywhere, alone heard her prayers, as during the short summer nights she knelt under the canopy of the trees, now comforted by the soothing music of the breeze in the tops, now torn by the boom of the Flanders guns, wondering, wondering how it would all end, and sometimes in her despair asking herself what was the good of it all. To her, in her then mood, it did not seem at all fantastic, nor, perhaps, was it, that when the wind blew a little east of south, coming straight to her from Flanders, it might perhaps have passed over the very place where one or other of her flesh and blood was braving indescrib-

able horrors. Sometimes her four-footed friend seemed to think so too, for head in air he would sniff and sniff, and getting up, wag his stump expectantly, whining a friendly welcome.

Somehow, those who had never known the knoll without the trees thought them inseparable, but Nature knew better. For nearly one hundred years they had bent to her harshest moods, shed a branch or two, but never given way. Now she was intent on destruction, and with peculiar irony chose Christmas night for the deed. She attacked them first from the south-west, then suddenly from the north-east, bringing freezing, clinging snow to her aid, and one by one those brave trees bent and bent under the weight and the blasts till they could bend no more. Something had to go, but it was not their feet, for like the noble trees they are, they kept them in the ground, stubborn to the last. One after the other the trunks broke across, and no one who heard it can ever forget the tearing, frightening noise of the breaking, or the poignant sight next morning of those familiar friends huddled together in a tangled mass—the work of a century gone in an hour. Truly, Nature builds up only to destroy.

NIMROD ON FOOT

Kent, with its homely fields and still black orchards, its gleaming chalk pits and unambitious downs, soaked with winter rain, clean and engaging, may be as good a place as any, when February lengthens into March, for an idle man to enjoy his idleness. Is this simply because perfect solitude is to be reached within thirty miles of London, and that London, being so near, seems to be so far away? The sense of miles is sometimes as destructive of a full enjoyment of the country as a sense of time is inimical to the enjoyment of work. Not so here, however. As the fox runs, such a quibble could have no bearing on a man's sense of ease. What mattered was that one was there with enough enterprise to investigate the field-paths and with enough spirit to face the ill-defined consequences of trespass.

In the English Channel the ships were having the very devil of a time. The wind that flung frigid masses of salt water against their shaking hulls and screamed disaster through their riggings came on headlong through this corner of England, whipping with briny lashes the yielding limbs of ancient trees, making toy storms on ponds and streams and blowing the rooks and wood-pigeons in scattering showers into the steel-blue of the afternoon sky. A grievous day it was for ewes near lambing, for cattle in the sodden meadows; but for men with any sense of combat in their souls a day for striding it "thorough bush, thorough briar," for sliding about the soggy banks, for splashing through fields where the long grass hid the lurking water.

There is a place where an old track, half overgrown with grass, meanders through three fields, and debouches, on the farther side of a stile, upon a subsidiary road. Tramps and people who have lost their way make most of the traffic thereon. Descending upon this road one was wrenched, as it were, out of a trance by sudden sight of a streak of yellowish red that shot like an urgent flame almost over one's toes and flashed through the hedge on the far side of the road. One waited seconds gazing at the hole the vision flashed through, and then that down-pressed muzzle, those flying feet, were duplicated a score of times as hounds came surging in a spate of tan and black and white after the fleeting fox. The hedge could no more hold them than paper could withstand shrapnel. And then the horses and the men—"the blood roared in their ears like fire, like fire the road beneath them burned." Some were through and some were over; gravel, mud, and turf rose in a shower behind the scurrying hoofs.

There are events of which the enactment may fill an hour or a minute. The beholder's senses are so overpowered by them and so enmeshed in them that his reactions are reduced to a single spasm of absorbed amazement. Long afterwards he may attempt to calculate how long the thing took to pass from its unexpected beginning to its tremendous crisis and bewildering end. Generally his conclusions will be wrong. But here was no occasion for watch-dials and measurements, so compelling were the horn of the huntsman and the baying of the hounds. "Follow, follow, follow!" The command was imperative. And so over the churned fields, up hill and down, by ditches, root-plots, and water-logged tracks one plunged in headlong chase after—heaven knows how far after—the tearing hunt. How odd, even ridiculous in these circumstances, sounded, as they came half-consciously to mind, the leisurely words of the framed itinerary—"taking the field-path on the left, follow it for five hundred yards to the oast-houses; there turn abruptly left on to the cart track, which, after half a mile, enters the main road at" What were such words to Nimrod?



SUNSET OVER ASHDOWN FOREST

Five hundred yards, indeed ; it was as if one had run five hundred miles, while the pink coats and the black grew swiftly smaller on the far crest and the thud of hoofs was swallowed in the wind. But the impulse in that first sight of the fox in flight lasted yet, and still the leagues, some walked, some run, some clambered or stumbled, dropped behind. After all, a man unencumbered may go where the hunt may not hope to pass, and the circling fox gave here and there the chance of a short cut.

At length the light began to fade. At a cross-road a fabulously expensive-looking motor-car was drawn up. From a window the head of a venerable old gentleman was thrust out ; its owner, who held a writhing lap-dog on his knee, asked in commanding accents for news of the hunt. One gave what one had and struggled on, raging at the gaucheries of opulence. But the day was dead for unmounted men. Hours later, in dry clothes, poring over a map, one lived again the dozen aching miles of that forlorn chase. A horse that afternoon would have been worth more than a kingdom if one had by any odd chance had one to exchange.

A SHELTERED CORNER

The keen north-easter draws steadily across the hillside, and on the shady side of the hedges the frozen soil holds the grey rime at noon ; the cloudless sun has barely strength to melt the southern edge of the furrows in the fields. Near the bottom of the slope stands a little farmstead, the house, the yards, and buildings sheltered by one great ash-tree and a grove of ragged, storm-scarred firs : and here, following the footpath across the plough-land, and turning through the yard-gate into the lee of the walls and roofs, the traveller steps at once into another climate. The high-pitched barn and the line of hayricks make a rampart against the bitter breeze, and the little square of the fold-yard which lies before them is a pocket of still air, with a lulling warmth some 30deg. higher than the temperature of the open fields.

This snug shelter is no deliberately planned thing ; it was at the beginning a chance arrangement—it looks even slovenly to-day—like so many of the features in old south-country homesteads, full of pleasant as well as profitable returns. In the little oasis every sense is happily exercised ; a faggot fallen from the wood-pile offers a friendly seat ; the thick-spread litter about the yard is dry and comfortable to muddy boots ; the air is full of the smell of the cut haystacks, of wood-smoke, of the resinous bark of the firs ; the eye ranges over walls of old red brick, grey oak timbering, tiled roofs warped and bowed by age, painted with the yellow and green of lichen and moss. There is a harmonious medley of sounds, the noises from the poultry ranging among the ricks, from the

lambing-pens, from the stalls where the bullocks are munching their feed, whistle of starlings and chirp of sparrows from the eaves of the thatch. All is calm and at ease, full of a sense of leisurely well-being and of freedom from any sharp pressure of time or need. The old horse, at holiday for the hour, half asleep with drooped head over the hay-rack in the middle of the yard, the sheep-dog curled up with nose on paws in the warmest corner by the root-pile well understand the comfortable atmosphere of the sunlit square, out of the icy breath sweeping over the naked earth, a breath only guessed at here by the murmur in the swaying firs and the hoarse sigh of the ash-boughs.

The sheltered corner with its easy-going disorder, its traditional hand-to-mouth devices, its companionable leisure, may seem, in a meditative moment under the sun-warmed wood-pile, to stand for a refuge from fiercer gales of adversity blowing over an ancient industry. There is no grain in the barns now; the few acres of poor wheat and oats were threshed out within a week or two after harvest; the hayricks are already deeply trenched upon; the mangold-clamp under its mounded thatch of bracken and brambles is all too small, and has already its open end. Yet, somehow, the old order of life persists here. The homestead still stands as a stronghold for the tradition of a thousand years, rich in possessions which the new order, with all its promised blessings, will most rigorously have to go without.

The sun, striking in through the wide open doors, sends a glimmering daylight across the recesses of the great barn, a shadowy cavern, with aisles divided by massive oak pillars rising to the roof. Not for years have the bays been filled with harvest sheaves; the old threshing-floor, where the flails used to thump through the winter weather, is a storage-place for machines, for heaps of potatoes, wire-netting, cord-wood; in the patch of sunlight by the doors are set a couple of coops with their clucking hens and busily foraging broods of early chicks. A row of bullocks feed at the racks on one side, and in a pen in a far corner the bull rattles his chain and clog. Ragged

curtains of old sacking, roped with cobwebs, shut off a sort of loft, piled with tight-rolled fleeces of wool.

A steady champing of a chaff-cutter, which has made a burden to the confused sounds of the yard, ceases, and an old man with a poke of chaff on his back comes down a ladder and crosses the barn-floor towards the stable. He is very tall still, though bent at knees and shoulders, and he moves with ungainly stiffness—past work any one would judge who did not know that old Jack at seventy-three can still turn his hand to half a score of crafts which just keep the farm alive as a going concern. He is the shepherd who looks after the little flock of cross-breeds, and just now is busy night and day with the lambing-pens beyond the barn ; he can still do a day's ploughing ; he digs and sets the farmhouse garden and his own patch ; he does such rough carpentering as keeps the rotten fences and gates from complete decay ; he is one of the few surviving thatchers in three parishes round ; he traps and ferrets against the eternal invasion of rat, rabbit, and mole.

On his way back from the stable he stops to light his pipe, taking a minute out of his ten-hour day, with large overtime, to rest old bones in the still warmth under the southern wall ; and so standing he seems to take his place among all the things which find harbourage in the shelter of the farmstead, a survivor preserved by a protective covert from influences ominously figured in the harsh blast driving across the open fields.

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